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THE

KNUTSFORD EDITION

THE WORKS OF

MRS. GASKELL

WITH INTRODUCTIONS
BY A. W. WARD

IN EIGHT VOLUMES

VOLUME VII

COUSIN PHILLIS

AND OTHER TALES

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15, WATERLOO PLACE
1906
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Emery Walker Ph. Sc

Mrs. Gaskell
(1864-5)
From the portrait by Samuel Laurence

London: Smith Elder & Co 15 Waterloo Place W

COUSIN PHILLIS

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BY

MRS. GASKELL

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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From a drawing by Samuel Laurence

LES ROCHERS (MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ'S CHÂTEAU) *To face page* 638
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PREFATORY NOTE

In the present volume, I have found it impossible to observe strictly the chronological sequence which in this edition it has been generally sought to maintain among Mrs. Gaskell's principal stories and her minor pieces respectively. Nearly the whole of this volume was in print, when an unexpected opportunity occurred of making an interesting addition to its contents. Some little time since, the Contributors' Book of "Household Words", now in the possession of Mr. R. C. Lehmann, M.P., was by him courteously placed at the disposal of Mr. B. W. Matz, of Messrs. Chapman & Hall, Editor of "The Dickensian", through whose friendly offices Mr. W. J. Williams, representing the Publishers of this edition, first heard of the existence of the book, and had an opportunity of examining it. This examination led to the identification of a contribution named "The Sin of a Father" with the story of "Right at Last", already published by Mrs. Gaskell, and to the discovery of a paper by her, entitled "The Shah's English Gardener", which has accordingly been inserted in the present volume.

It further came to the knowledge of Mr. Williams that the Account Books of "All the Year Round", of which the present whereabouts has not been ascertained, had been seen by the late Mr. F. G. Kitton, who had noticed the mention in them of several contributions by Mrs. Gaskell. Among these entries was that of "The Ghost in the Garden Room", one of the stories in "The Haunted House", the 1859 Christmas number of the journal, which is identical

with Mrs. Gaskell's powerful story of "The Crooked Branch"; while another entry showed that Mrs. Gaskell wrote the first tale in "Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings", the 1863 Christmas number. This tale proves to be, so far as the first two-thirds of it are concerned, to all intents and purposes the same as an incomplete MS. among Mrs. Gaskell's papers, with which I have been enabled to compare it, before printing it in the present volume.

Mr. R. C. Lehmann, Mr. Arthur Waugh, the managing director of Messrs. Chapman & Hall, and Mr. Matz, are requested to accept an expression of sincere thanks for so kindly facilitating our inquiries. This courtesy has been in perfect keeping with the mutual goodwill which always marked the relations between Mrs. Gaskell and the great originator of "Household Words" and "All the Year Round."

A. W. W.

September, 1906.

INTRODUCTION TO "COUSIN PHILLIS," ETC.

"NATURE and Art—Art and Nature", wrote Goethe, more oracular on this occasion in manner than in matter, "should be one and the same thing on the stage." And surely, if his added explanation be accepted, the axiom holds good, not only of the theatre, but of creative literature. For when "Art succeeds in transmuting itself into Nature," then "Nature fully asserts herself in Art."

There cannot be any dispute as to Mrs. Gaskell having in "Cousin Phillis" among all her shorter stories approached most nearly to literary perfection; while the human sympathies of many a generation of readers to come may be trusted to respond unreservedly to the direct appeal made to them in this simple tale. Thus Art and Nature have here, whether consciously or not matters little, joined in achieving that triumph which is so commonly marred by some defect, some oversight, some misapprehension, in the one direction or the other. In a diamond such as "Cousin Phillis", "of purest ray serene", there is no flaw; and I do not know how better to describe what seems to me the rare felicitousness of this exquisite production. It is at the same time an admirable example of a species of fiction in which Mrs. Gaskell was one of the first among English writers to excel; nor has the "short story", in which, though the canvas is comparatively small in extent, room is left for a delineation and working-out of character to which the

"Christmas story" of the Dickensian type made no pretence, reached quite the same height of success in any other English hands.

But it may be worth while to recall how simple were the materials of which Mrs. Gaskell made use in this beautiful little work, and out of which she composed one of the loveliest prose idylls in our literature. The freedom with which she has combined these materials is in itself a sign of the happy ease of her workmanship. Thus there can be no doubt as to the original locality—northern, but with no strongly marked northern characteristics—of the scene in which the story plays. There is no mystery about the Hope Farm at Heathbridge, described so faithfully both in its unchanging indoor domesticity and in a series of outdoor pictures that seem to bring the seasons themselves home to us—corn-harvest following on hay-making, and apple-gathering on corn-harvest. The Heathbridge of "Cousin Phillis" is Sandlebridge in Cheshire, within easy reach of Knutsford, for which "Eltham" may be here supposed to do duty; and the Hope Farm is, with differences, the house owned by Mrs. Gaskell's grandfather, Mr. Samuel Holland, the home of her mother, familiar to herself for many years, and, again with differences, described in "Cranford" as Woodley, the residence of Mr. Holbrook, who quoted Tennyson under the cedar-tree, as the minister quoted Vergil in the light of the sunset. Sandlebridge had come into the possession of the Holland family through the marriage, in 1718, of John Holland to Mary, daughter of Peter Colthurst, whose family had held the estate of Sandlebridge for several generations. It is noticeable that in "Cousin Phillis" particular mention is made of the "two great gates between pillars, crowned with stone balls, for a state entrance to the flagged path leading up to the front-door"—the door which, being "handsome and all for show," was by nonconformist wit dubbed "the rector." Beyond a doubt these were the identical balls,

from one to the other of which the great Clive, on a visit to Sandlebridge in his thoughtless youth, had been wont to jump, greatly to the alarm of the Holland household.

On the other hand, it is difficult to resist the impression that in the minister-farmer Holman, who was master at the Hope Farm, there are some very interesting reminiscences of Mrs. Gaskell's own father, William Stevenson. He was at one time a Unitarian minister; and, after quitting the ministry, devoted himself to agricultural pursuits, and became an authority on many subjects connected with them. As has been said elsewhere in this edition, he seems to have been a man of much originality; and it was the combination of intellectual power and practical good sense with deep religious feeling which evidently had strongly impressed itself upon his daughter. This combination came home to her inmost nature; nor has there ever been a more striking picture drawn than this of a man desirous of putting religion into the whole of this life. But the humorous aspect of these blended qualities also struck her; not only does he pray for the cattle and live creatures at evening "exercise", but, while still on his knees, he orders John to see that the sick cow has her warm mash. And, again, the minister (though his is not the kind of faith to be sapped by doubts) is unable quite to ignore the difference between himself and his brethren, even when, at the time of his daughter's dangerous illness, they come to console him (not without references to the Book of Job). In the grand outlines of his patriarchal personality, minister Holman is like a figure from "Hermann and Dorothea"; but the pulse of human emotion beats vehemently in him, and his love for his child is strong enough to unman him.

What thoughts of others near and dear to her entered into Mrs. Gaskell's conception of further personages in the little drama that ran its course at the Hope Farm, who can tell? Cousin Phillis herself is a creation of indescribable

charm ; but, lovely as it is, there comes to it an irradiation which seems to make it lovelier than itself, while all the time we are but too well aware that this vision of love will prove delusive. The birds, we know, are the friends of poets, and they have rendered good service in poetic literature from the days of Dante and Chaucer onwards. But when have they, without leave asked or granted, ventured to make melody in a printed page, like that in which they alternate with sweet Phillis in her hour of happiness ?

"I never saw her so lovely, or so happy. I think she hardly knew why she was so happy, all the time. I can see her now, standing under the budding branches of the grey trees, over which a tinge of green seemed to be deepening day after day, her sun-bonnet fallen back on her neck, her hands full of delicate wood-flowers, quite unconscious of my gaze, but intent on sweet mockery of some bird in neighbouring bush or tree. She had the art of warbling, and replying to the notes of different birds, and knew their song, their habits and ways, more accurately than any one else I ever knew. She had often done it at my request, the spring before; but this year she really gurgled, and whistled, and warbled, just as they did, out of the very fulness and joy of her heart. She was more than ever the very apple of her father's eye; her mother gave her both her own share of love and that of the dead child who had died in infancy."

"Look," says Shakspere, "where the painter would surpass the life!" It may be so; but out of the fulness of the heart it cometh; and the last touch, too, in the enchanting passage which I have quoted, could not be omitted. No human joy, not even that of contemplating a creature, a child, of such exquisite loveliness, but brings with it some remembrance, some regret.

But the charm of this story is a homely charm; all its characters, with the single exception of Holdsworth, whom a fatal chance brings into this scene of peace to disturb it, partake of this simplicity—a simplicity of manners and of that which lies at the root of manners. The intellectual curiosity of Phillis—who reads Dante like Margaret in

"North and South"—is as unaffected as her mother's complete lack of it; Betty's affection is as unvarnished as that of Sally in "Ruth," though in such a household as the minister's she instinctively "knows her place", and administers the naked truth only to so defenceless an offender as Cousin Paul. Poor Paul himself, the narrator of the story, is as delightfully natural as any of the characters in it. His discovery of Phillis's maiden love is told with simple delicacy, and his "tactical" blunder in revealing to her Holdsworth's affection is so perfectly consistent with his sympathetic point of view as to be altogether excusable.

Thus the plot, itself quite simple, unfolds itself without jarring on us at any stage of its progress; and I do not remember any instance of so delicate a treatment of so tender a theme, unless it be the exquisite little play, "Carmosine", by Alfred de Musset, treating the same story as that on which George Eliot founded her poem "How Lisa loved the King."

And so, even the ending of Paul's narrative, like the whole of its previous course, leaves the harmony of our sympathies unbroken. What is the actual end, we do not know, though something has been said to suggest a fear. The idea of a "last scene long years after", suggested to Mrs. Gaskell, was (fortunately, I think) not entertained by her. There might have been a melancholy charm in the picture of a beneficent womanhood assuaging the melancholy remembrance of a broken youth, and suggesting what Mrs. Gaskell, half-humorously, half-tenderly, describes as "a sort of moral 'Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all.'" But it is quite enough that we should know what Paul tells us of the time when Phillis was slowly, slowly recovering. "I sometimes grew despondING, and feared that she would never be what she had been before; no more she has, in some ways."

Introduction

"Cousin Phillis" first appeared in the "Cornhill Magazine," from November, 1863, to February, 1864; and was reprinted with "other Tales" by Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co. in November, 1865, with three illustrations by Du Maurier. A French translation, by F. D. Forgues, which first appeared in 1867, went through several editions; that published in 1879, with a version of "A Dark Night's Work," was accompanied by a very appreciative study on "*Elisabeth Gaskell et ses Ouvrages*" by Mme. Louise Sw. Belloc.

"Lois the Witch," which first appeared in "All the Year Round" from October 8th to 22nd, 1859, and was first reprinted in a volume entitled "Right at Last, and other Tales," published by Messrs. Sampson, Low, and Co. in 1860, belongs to a date rather earlier than what may be described as the latest group of Mrs. Gaskell's literary productions. Among the characteristics of that group are a rare finish of style, and an exquisite blending of delicate humour with deep pathos, which I think Thirlwall, who was so greatly impressed by "Sylvia's Lovers", would not have hesitated to qualify as partaking of that "irony" which he traced in the serenest of Attic tragedians. Of this there are but few instances in the story, not less painful than powerful, of "Lois the Witch." The authoress seems to fall back upon that idea of fate or destiny, which makes its presence felt in more than one of her minor stories, and against the oppressiveness of which she, like many great authors before and after her—I do not scruple to say, like the great Greek tragedians themselves—found it so difficult to contend. "Human nature," truly observes William Arnold, in a note on what he terms the prevalence of this motive in Mrs. Gaskell's writings, "rebels against undeserved misfortune, and finds it hard to swallow even in art. . . . The great artist, nevertheless, makes us swallow what is so difficult, and shows us an inner, further harmony." This

harmony, which is fully evolved in "Sylvia's Lovers", and tenderly indicated in "Cousin Phillis," is not to be found in "Lois the Witch." The cruelty of poor Lois's doom, unmitigated except by her own charity in the hour of death towards a fellow-sufferer, rests upon us unrelieved; and, sad as the story is, nothing in it is so pitiful as the formal apology of her persecutors and the thrice-repeated lament of her broken-hearted lover: "All this will not bring my Lois to life again, or give me back the hope of my youth." Yet here, too, Mrs. Gaskell cannot forget where all contradictions are reconciled, and all sorrows healed; for Lois's true lover is most true to her, and to the spirit in which she suffered, when he prays for forgiveness for those that brought her to her cruel death.

In itself, the construction of this story is both even and skilful, and the authoress acquits herself with remarkable success of the task which she had set herself of making truth seem probable. In the whole ghastly and grotesque chapter of that history of human delusions whose final volume still seems so far distant—in the whole of the annals of witchcraft—no passages are so melancholy and so humiliating as the latest.

But the problems which here suggest themselves cannot be discussed on the present occasion. More considerations than one help to explain the appalling fact of its having been at the close of the Middle Ages, in the very period of the dawn of the New Learning, that one of the most awful and prolonged of all the moral epidemics which have ever pervaded Western Europe took hold upon it in the shape of a general persecution of witches and witchcraft. The prevalence of this epidemic during the sixteenth and a great part of the seventeenth centuries in Protestant countries was partly due to the desire of Protestant divines and governments not to fall behind their Catholic neighbours in meeting what was regarded as a common peril, but still more to the control

which theology had assumed over the minds of men, and the formalism—the belief in the letter of the Bible—into which theology seemed to have succeeded in compressing the Christian religion. In England, the belief in witchcraft was, with its terrible practical consequences so long as it remained an accepted tenet, specially prolonged by a sinister combination of influences—the perverseness of a sovereign of King James I.'s intellectual activity, the desire for authority which possessed the Church, and the immovable stolidity of the judges of the Realm. Even the Great Revolution, which overthrew throne and bishops, failed to break down the edifice of superstition of which I am speaking; nor was it (as Buckle has shown in a well-known passage of his well-known work) till the next generation—the period from the Restoration to the second (or "glorious") Revolution —that the belief in witchcraft gradually ceased to possess the majority of educated Englishmen, and that persons charged with this offence found (in Chief Justice Holt) protection on the Judicial Bench. But the law against witchcraft passed by Parliament in the year of Queen Elizabeth's accession (1559) remained on our statute-book till 1736; and there seems no doubt that isolated cases of execution for a crime, in whose reality even Wesley had not ceased to believe, occurred in England in the early years of the eighteenth century.

Meanwhile, many, though not all, of the Puritan emigrants, who during the civil troubles of the previous century had, in order to preserve intact their civil and religious freedom, found their way across the Atlantic to New England, had taken with them the deadly superstition of which we are speaking, and which had so long infected the life of the old country. In the long winters among the mysterious forests, in the perilous vicinity of savage races of whose own life little was known beyond tales of strange traditions and dark practices, an atmosphere must have been created round

many of the immigrants with which their own inherited superstitions readily mingled. Mrs. Gaskell has herself well described these experiences and their effect in an admirable passage of her story, illustrating her quick sensitiveness to such historical and social phenomena. The terrible experiences of "Philip's War" in 1675–6, though it had ended with the destruction of the power of the Indians in southern New England, had intensified the feelings of repugnance which these people inspired; and when war broke out between France and England in 1690, the French took large bodies of Indians into their pay. In the year 1692, when the witch-finding and witch-killing epidemic came to an outbreak at Salem, there were other causes of anxiety and depression—such as visitations of the small-pox, and a series of great fires at Boston—which disposed the public mind in Massachusetts to give way with special readiness to delusive terrors.

The story of the witchcraft "discoveries" and persecution at Salem, all of which belong to the year 1692, may be read in Bryant and Gay's "Popular History of the United States" (vol. ii., 1878), and in earlier authorities, of which a list is given there. It will be seen from a reference to this narrative with what skill Mrs. Gaskell has made use of the suggestions supplied by her historical material. The Indian element is there; for it was an old Indian female slave, called Tituba, whose tricks first infected some precocious children at Salem village with a morbid desire to dabble in the practices of sorcery. In "Lois the Witch" the motive of the wicked Prudence's action is therefore in no sense far-fetched. Other details are worked into the progress of the story, without violence being done either to its general probability, or to its general agreement with the actual course of events. The proceedings against Lois seem more or less modelled upon those against Rebecca Nourse, of whom the historians say that in the midst of a happy

married life she was suddenly, because of a business quarrel in which her husband had become involved, subjected to an accusation from which there was no escape.

"The children" cried out "one day against Rebecca Nourse; the usual display of hysterics, fits, possessions, took place, terrible to the overwrought feeling of the spectators. A clergyman, named Lawson, delivered a most exciting discourse, which put the witchcraft trials upon Scripture grounds and confirmed all minds. A blameless life and a sweet demeanour at her trial could not save Rebecca. The jury were forced to believe her innocent but were sent out till they consented. She went the way of all the rest to Witches' Hill. . . ."

Of the one or two historical personages introduced into the tale, the redoubtable Dr. Cotton Mather at all events, the author of "The Wonders of the Invisible World, being an Account of the Trial of several Witches, etc." (1693), could have no right to complain of the prominence here given to his personality. When Stephen Burroughs, one of the victims of the Salem panic, was hanged, Cotton Mather stood by, and, "when the people seemed impressed by" the "sweet and lofty words" of the condemned man, "explained that Satan often transformed himself into an angel of light to delude men's souls." While his distinguished father, Dr. Increase Mather (President of Harvard), is stated to have been one of those who, as the Salem trials continued, had the courage to declare his disbelief in the guilt of the accused, Dr. Cotton Mather never flinched, and, when all was over, persisted that, though errors might have been committed on both sides, "which will never be understood till the day when Satan shall be bound after another manner than he is at this day," yet, "for my own part, I know not that ever I have advanced any opinion in the matter of witchcraft, but what all the ministers of the Lord that I know of in the world, whether English or Scotch, or French or Dutch, are of the same opinion with me." Among the Massachusetts justices, whose ill-fortune it was to be concerned

in these trials, one at least quitted the bench rather than go through with them; and of those who "sat through the tragedy . . . Judge Sewall . . . afterwards read a recantation in the Old South Church, bowed down with mortification and sorrow." This incident is not only mentioned by Mrs. Gaskell, but gives occasion for the very tender and touching close of her narrative.

The authoress of "Lois the Witch" was thus only too well provided with material out of which to shape her story. That such a theme should have suggested itself to her for treatment in a narrative which would need little adventitious interest to heighten its tragic force was natural enough. The supernatural always had a strong attraction for Mrs. Gaskell, and her imagination could not fail to concern itself with those human delusions which are closely connected with the terrors largely fed by an instinctive tendency to which her own mind was no stranger. But, while her sweet reasonableness subdued all such fancies, no principle which influenced her was stronger than her abhorrence of injustice, and no conviction held by her was so much part of herself as the belief, that what is most divine in man is the forgiveness of those who sin against him. Very possibly, an incident which occurred not many years before she wrote "Lois the Witch" may have first suggested such a tale to her. Some time in the early fifties, she was staying with her husband in a country-house in Essex, when—early one Sunday morning—their host, a county magistrate, was hastily summoned to prevent an attempt to bring to her death an old woman in a neighbouring village, who was suspected by the inhabitants of being a witch. The incident, which is not the less true because of its seeming improbability, made a deep impression upon Mrs. Gaskell, who frequently made mention of it in her family. It is an interesting illustration of her artistic instinct that Lois, the gentle English girl whom across the seas blind chance and blinder

superstition, egged on by jealousy and malice, turn into a witch and put to death as a criminal, is a native not of Puritan Essex, but of a quiet little village among the green meadows through which flows the silver, glittering Avon, the heart of the royalist west. To Mrs. Gaskell herself that was a country full of remembrances of a happy, romantic girlhood; and a touch of personal sympathy seems thus to be added to her story of the innocent victim of slanderous tongues and more inhuman misbeliefs.

The volume ("Right at Last, and other Tales") in which "Lois the Witch" was first reprinted also contained the tragic story of "The Crooked Branch", which had made its first appearance in the 1859 Christmas number of "All the Year Round," where it formed part of the collective series called "The Haunted House" under the separate title of "The Ghost in the Garden Room." As such, it was reprinted in 1903 in one of the pretty volumes of Christmas stories from "Household Words and All the Year Round, edited by Charles Dickens"; so that the story has led a kind of double life, well suited to its original presentment. The introductory page or "link" to "The Ghost in the Garden Room" is palpably from the hand of the Editor.

The dramatic qualities of this story, under whatever name, were certain to command immediate interest; nor is it surprising to learn that when, on one occasion, it formed the subject of a dramatic reading by the late Sir Henry Irving (a great admirer, as I am informed, of Mrs. Gaskell's writings), its effect was quite extraordinary. Even Irving's rare power of intensification could hardly have added to the pitiful suspense of the final scene of this domestic tragedy, the most tragic episode in all Mrs. Gaskell's stories; for in "A Dark Night's Work" the accidental element is paramount. The solemn gloom of the

catastrophe contrasts very effectively with the kindly humour of the opening of the story, in which the laconic wooing of Nathan Huntroyd reminds us of that of Mr. Openshaw in the "Manchester Marriage" rather than of that of the immortal Mr. Barkis. An incomparable turn in Nathan's offer of his heart and hand and farm—"Wilt like to come? I'll not mislead thee. It's dairy, and it might have been arable"—Mrs. Gaskell owed to the humour of a friend. It was taken from a passage in the (then unprinted, now only privately printed) "Country Conversations", admirable transcripts of actual talks with poor people which had been read to her in manuscript. The general idea of the story of "The Crooked Branch", the unspeakable "sharpness" of the anguish caused by the thanklessness of a wicked son, is here worked out with far stronger emotional force than either in "The Moorland Cottage" or in "Ruth." Mrs. Gaskell very rarely indeed merely repeated herself.*

Nothing could be more different in tone and manner from the preceding stories than the gay and graceful fancy mockingly entitled "Curious if True." It delighted the readers of the "Cornhill Magazine" of February, 1860, and was reprinted in 1865 by Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co. in a volume named "The Grey Woman, and other Tales." The title, suggested to Mrs. Gaskell by the late Mr. George Smith, is extremely happy; as she wrote shortly before the publication of "Curious if True", "it just makes people have a notion that it *might* be true, which is what is wanted from the beginning." The little piece opens with the sober precision of statement befitting a descendant

* This applies even to details. Though she was not, in one sense of the word, a very careful writer, the rapidity of her imagination was always moving forward. The recurrence of such an incident as the snapping of the thread at the spinning-wheel, which, in not very different circumstances, marks the preoccupation of Cousin Phillis and of Faith Hickson in "Lois the Witch", is quite exceptional.

of "that sister of Calvin's who married a Whittingham, Dean of Durham",* to which we are accustomed in stories of the supernatural, narrated by Provosts or other dignitaries of unimpeachable accuracy. But we soon find that the region into which we are translated is peopled by the harmless denizens of fairy-land, and that the fairy-godmother who has assembled the ghostly evening-party in the enchanted *château* for our delectation, is our old friend Madame D'Aulnoy. The company to whom Mr. Whittingham has the honour of a fleeting introduction, Puss-in-Boots, the Sleeping Beauty, Little Red Riding-hood, and the rest, are identified with admirable variety of humour. Hardly any one of them, however, is touched off quite so well as the tender-hearted widow, who in our own day would probably not have failed to produce an "intimate" memoir of her late much misunderstood husband—if only from natural sympathy with the colour which his name recalls:

"'Alas! alas!' said she, 'you too accurately describe a miserable passage in my life, which has often been represented in a false light. The best of husbands'—here she sobbed, and became slightly inarticulate with her grief—'will sometimes be displeased. I was young and curious—he was justly angry with my disobedience—my brothers were too hasty—the consequence is, I became a widow.'"

From this "interlude of fairies" we return to real life in "Right at Last", which, as has been only quite recently discovered, was first printed in "Household Words", November 27, 1858, under the title "The Sin of a Father", and republished in 1860 with "other Tales" by Messrs. Sampson, Low & Co. "Right at Last" can hardly be described as one of Mrs. Gaskell s most successful efforts of its kind; though there is no want of fidelity to nature in some of the characters of the story, from the rough, kindly professor in familiar Edinburgh to the "treasure" of a man-servant, a respectful villain of the Littimer type. The plot

* This statement, though frequently repeated, appears to be fictitious.

(in the course of which the dubious liberality of the convict father remotely recalls the onerous gifts of Magwitch in "Great Expectations", of which the publication, it will be remembered, did not begin till December, 1860), is not managed with perfect consistency; for, had the brave Margaret before her marriage become aware of her lover's compromising parentage, she could not for a time have failed to guess the cause of her husband's moody depression. In any case, she is drawn with *verve*, and with the sympathy due to that much-discussed species of courage which, for want of a simpler term, we are accustomed to call "moral." The incident of her cleaning her own door-step in the days of small means, brought upon her husband and herself by their resolution to tell the truth and take the consequences, appears to have been borrowed by Mrs. Gaskell from the actual experience of a well-known Edinburgh lady. This high-minded wife had encouraged her husband as an advocate to plead the cause of one on whom the powers that were looked askance; and when he was hereupon suddenly involved in professional ruin, she who had been an admired beauty of Edinburgh ball-rooms did not scruple to become her own housemaid.

"The Grey Woman" first appeared in "All the Year Round" on January 5th, 12th, and 19th, 1861, and was reprinted with "other Tales" by Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co. in 1865. The *mise-en-scène* of its opening was no doubt suggested to Mrs. Gaskell by the remembrance of a happy journey she made in 1858 up the Rhine, before a long and happy stay at Heidelberg with her daughters Meta and Florence. Two years afterwards, Mrs. Gaskell, with her daughters Marianne, Florence and Julia, again visited Heidelberg, where they were lionised by a young English Professor, who was there carrying on the researches which have made the name of Sir Henry Roscoe famous in the scientific world.

Introduction

"The mill by the Neckar-side" is an admirably-chosen scene of smiling place and prosperity, from which the unhappy Anna Scherer of the tale is hurried away into the unspeakable terrors of her early married life.* The fruitful hills and valleys, and the light-hearted population of the Palatinate have, in the eventful course of its history, undergone more utter devastation and more terrible sufferings than have fallen to the lot of any other part of Germany and its people.

But the main action of the story of "The Grey Woman" is laid further to the north-west, in that part of France which lies on the left bank of the Middle Rhine, and south of the Moselle. As a matter of fact, in the course of the story the miscreants whose evil doings are recounted in it are identified with "the savage and mysterious band of robbers called the *Chauffeurs*, who infested all the roads leading to the Rhine, with Schinderhannes at their head."

The annals of brigandage—more especially in the Rhinelands and the south-west generally, and in the neighbouring districts of the Low Countries and France—form a very curious chapter in the history of German civilisation in the eighteenth century. The institution was really a legacy of the Thirty Years' War, after the termination of which it had never died out in these and some other parts of Germany; but it was revived with the outbreak of hostilities between Prussia and France in the days of the Seven Years' War, and rose to its height with the advent of the French Revolution and the troubles consequent upon it. I need

* The complications which mark the religious history of the Palatinate have not unnaturally involved the narrator of poor Anna's history in one or two inconsistencies. She bids her daughter lay her story "before the good priest Schriesheim"; but it is elsewhere stated that she was of the Lutheran, and her husband of the "Reformed" persuasion; and again, that they were married in the court chapel at Karlsruhe. The grounds on which Anna justified to herself her second marriage, while her villainous first husband was still alive, must be described as hazy.

hardly remind the readers of Schiller of the young poet's attempt to infuse something like idealism into the hero of "The Robbers"; and in his less-known tale of "The Criminal because of a lost good-name" ("*Der Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre*") there is at least a touch of sentiment. Among the leaders or members of the robber-bands which towards the close of the century infested the Franco-German frontier-lands there may have been some whose story, character, or manners appealed to the sense of the romantic which at that time was so prevalent on both sides of the Rhine. "*Der bairische Hiesel*" (Matthæus Klostermann), for instance, whose misdeeds, beginning with poaching exploits, and interrupted by successive periods of imprisonment, ended with his undergoing a hideous death in a pious frame of mind, was actually celebrated in popular poetry. No such sympathy is evoked by the story of the scoundrel whose nickname "Schinderhannes" (to which he rather objected himself) has had the singular fortune of surviving, while the appellations of nearly all his associates and competitors are forgotten. Johannes Bückler, born at Mühlen near Nastätten in Nassau, on May 25, 1778, and hanged at Mainz, in the company of nineteen fellow-culprits, on November 21, 1803, seems to have been, except in the amount of crime he managed to crowd into his brief career, and the blaze of notoriety in which it ended,* a somewhat ordinary kind of rascal. Certainly, there is hardly a redeeming feature to be found in what is handed down of his actions and conduct—he was neither very courageous nor very faithful to his comrades; but extenuating circumstances may be found in the times in which he lived and the circumstances in which he had—

* The energy with which he and his band, together with a number of other robbers, were finally brought to trial, was due to the French administration on the left bank of the Rhine. New brooms sweep clean.

partly as a child in a soldiers' camp—been brought up. But he seems to have suited the popular fancy, with his long knife, rifle, brace of pistols, and axe, and the display which was part of his character; and it is possible that his special hostility to the Jews may not have unfavourably affected the impression which he made. After the first promise of his subsequent career had been shown forth in his conduct, he was apprenticed to an executioner (*Schinder*); but soon he relapsed into his chosen line of felony, and, having about 1798 found his way into the company of Mosebach of Liebhausen, the first organiser of systematic robbery of horses and other property in the Hundsrück, he began a regular career of crime. There is no necessity for pursuing this on the present occasion, since it will be clear from what has been already said that the story of "The Grey Woman" is not specially based on any part of the biography of "Schinderhannes." One or two incidents in the latter may however have suggested certain details in Mrs. Gaskell's narrative.

Near Coblenz Schinderhannes and a wandering minstrel, Christian Reinhard, whom he had picked up on the way, are stated to have robbed a Marquis La Ferrière of his money and equipage, Schinderhannes even changing clothes with the Marquis. (This may have conceivably suggested the nobleman's disguise assumed by the robber-chief of our story.) They sold the carriage to two Frenchmen, who were afterwards arrested at Frankfort as Schinderhannes and Reinhard.

The castle, so admirably described in the story, recalls the dismantled castle of Schmittburg, which Schinderhannes at one time inhabited with a girl who was his paramour, while the robbers of his band settled themselves in the castle-chapel. Not far from the Schmittburg was the Kallenfels, a sheer rock surmounted by a farmstead, whither, after the commission of a violent robbery, Schinderhannes,

with his female companion and four of the robbers, for safety's sake migrated for a sojourn of eleven days.

Finally, the mysterious *consigne* by which the *Chauffeurs* in the story mark the successive stages of what they deem to be their accomplished vengeance, has its counterpart in the three successive warnings issued by Schinderhannes to a farmer who responded too slowly to a process of black-mailing:

"N^ro I.
† † † consider;"

with "N^ro II." and "N^ro III." following. The first of these missives was signed "*Johann durch den Wald*," a title which Johann Bückler preferred to the opprobrious designation under which he still lives in popular tradition.*

On the whole, and in the absence of any record on the subject, I am inclined to conclude that Mrs. Gaskell had met with some French version of the story of Schinderhannes or some other robber-chief of his times; and that from this source she derived the name of the "*Chauffeurs*", and perhaps some of the incidents of her story. At the same time, there is no reason whatever for supposing that by far the most interesting portion of it—the escape of Anna and her faithful, self-sacrificing maid Amante from the robbers' castle, and their long and almost desperate flight—was not the original invention of the writer. It must be allowed that M. de La Tourelle from his own point of view committed a quite inexplicable blunder in sending for a maid to attend his wife; but the character of the brave Amante

* The most easily accessible account of Schinderhannes is that by C. Rauchhaupt, a specialist on the subject (3rd ed^n., Kreuznach, s.d.). Much the same facts are given in briefer form in J. E. Hitzig and W. Häring (W. Alexis)'s *Neuer Pitaval*, continued by A. Vollert, new series, vol. vi. (Leipzig, 1871). On the whole subject of German brigandage towards the close of the eighteenth century, see chap. 48 of vol. ii. of A. Sach's "Deutsches Leben in der Vergangenheit" (Halle, 1891).

is the best thing in the story, and her death its saddest incident.

"Six Weeks at Heppenheim", which was first published in the "Cornhill Magazine" in May, 1862, and reprinted with "The Grey Woman, and other Tales" by Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co. in 1865, forms a charming *pendant* to the rather gruesome story which Mrs. Gaskell had brought home from her German travels. This time we are transported into the very heart of the genial wine-country of the Upper-Rhine, into the so-called *Bergstrasse* opposite Worms, down which, in the dire days of the Thirty Years' War, the invading hosts passed into the Palatinate, without meeting with much resistance from the ecclesiastical rulers of this by-street of the great *Pfaffengasse*. In 1803 the famous *Reichsdeputationshauptschluss* secularised the archiepiscopal electorate of Mainz, to which Heppenheim and Lorsch belonged, and these possessions, with not a few others (103 square geographical miles and 210,000 "souls" in all), passed into the willing hands of Duke Lewis X. of Hesse-Darmstadt. As, three years later, he assumed the title of "Grand Duke of Hesse and by Rhine", I have ventured to correct Herr Müller's designation of his vigilant sovereign by an inferior title. For the rest, the nicety with which this singularly truthful little picture of real life is fitted into its frame bears a striking testimony to Mrs. Gaskell's extraordinary quickness and accuracy of observation. She had no very familiar knowledge of South German peasant life—such as that which the late Lady Verney possessed of the peasant life of France—and "Heppenheim" was probably only a name happily chosen to suit a village and a village-inn by which she was attracted, when in the vicinity of the Rhine. But she had that true interest in all things human—of which things national, provincial, and local are after all only sections or subsections—which makes all travelling

delightful and *ambulando* instructive. Thus, while she informed herself as to the rules of the vineyards, and the marriage customs of their cultivators, she had an eye for every detail of daily life and for every idiom of language. ("*Du armes Wurm*" is a real bit of German, the full significance of which is only known to those who are familiar with the aspect of a real *Wickelkind*.) "Six Weeks at Heppenheim" in its reality, freshness, and wholesome avoidance of anything approaching to artificial pathos, breathes the spirit of Berthold Auerbach; and, as in the *Dorfgeschichten*, so a touch of poetry is not wanting in the gentle young Oxonian's simple tale of Thekla and her faithful master.

"A Dark Night's Work", which appeared in successive numbers of "All the Year Round" from January 24, 1863, to March 21, 1863, and was published in book-form, with four illustrations by Du Maurier, in the following April by Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co., seems to belong to a rather earlier period of her productivity than that of "Sylvia's Lovers" and "Cousin Phillis", with which in date of publication it was so nearly contemporary. Perhaps the nature of the interest excited by the story did not admit of its being as it were bathed in the same atmosphere of charm; but, as I find William Arnold noted, it would be an error to reckon "A Dark Night's Work" among the "grim stories" for which Mrs. Gaskell undoubtedly had something of a *penchant;* "it is a study of a human soul, not merely a murder-story." But the "human soul", if thereby that of Ellinor's father is meant—for in Ellinor herself there is nothing abnormal, and Dixon, admirably drawn as he is, plays only a subordinate part till the real catastrophe of the story is reached—has no very great interest for us, and hardly rises above ordinary ignobility. That the character does just rise above it, is due to the refinement which gives distinction even to a story of this *genre* in Mrs. Gaskell's hands. It is interesting to

compare "A Dark Night's Work", not with the productions of Wilkie Collins, with which, notwithstanding the carefully planning of its scheme of locality, it has no real affinity, but with one of Mrs. Oliphant's shorter stories, such as "The Prodigals", which, by a curious coincidence, I happened to take up just as I was re-reading Mrs. Gaskell's story, and which, in the general character of plot and treatment, bears a certain resemblance to it. As the teller of a story Mrs. Oliphant was perhaps the more expert craftsman; she avoided certain *longueurs* which are not absent from "A Dark Night's Work", and certain repetitions which are to be found there. She was an acute observer of life, and of the deeper significance of common experiences; but she lacked that delicacy of touch and spiritual sympathy which were characteristic of all Mrs. Gaskell's creations. In every period or phase of her literary labours, "A Dark Night's Work" illustrates very signally the wide difference between this delicacy of touch and insipidity. The figure of Canon Livingstone, whom in most stories of the kind one would have been prepared to take for granted, and who has really as little to do with the plot of the piece as he has with the boisterous hilarity of the Roman *corso*, is by no means the least sympathetic among its *dramatis personæ*. But there is something more than delicacy of touch in at least part of the story. The effect of the deed, in which he was not even a participant, upon the simple single-minded Dixon is depicted with extraordinary truthfulness; and his solemn, mournful figure—in the dock and in prison—haunts the memory like an actual experience of the sorrowfulness of life.

The three papers entitled "French Life", which originally appeared in "Fraser's Magazine" in April, May, and June, 1864, and are now for the first time reprinted, gave great pleasure when they introduced themselves to the public, and

are in their way thoroughly characteristic of the writer. Mrs. Gaskell had in a singular degree the gift of what I may call *intimacy;* and these papers, which pretend to nothing but giving some glimpses of particular sides of French life *from within*, most successfully accomplish this particular purpose. It was said of Madame Récamier, who is mentioned in one of these papers as having had in perfection "the sixth sense, which taught her when to speak, and when to be silent," *qu'elle se souvenait avec goût*—to which a more cynical critic added, "*qu'elle savait s'ennuyer avec une grace parfaite.*" Of Mrs. Gaskell it may be asserted that, while she observed with quick insight, she chronicled with unfailing tact. For the things she noted, whether in Madame A——'s hospitable bed-room, or in the silken chamber of the condescending *lionne*, or in the ample drawing-room where Madame E—— dispensed tea at a guinea a pound to those who cared for the beverage, were always things distinctive and things possessed of a human interest. And there is one special association which gives a charm of its own to these papers. When in 1862 she set forth on her excursion into Brittany in the company of her daughter Meta and their intimate friend Miss Isabel Thompson (now Mrs. William Sidgwick), it was "with a happy mixture of sea, heath, rocks, ferns, and Madame de Sévigné in their hands," that the happy company started on its visit of investigation. I may leave her to describe that pleasant journey from Paris (past Rambouillet) to Chartres, and thence to Vitré, only a few miles from which lies the central object of this pilgrimage, Madame de Sévigné's *château* of Les Rochers. Readers who have not themselves visited the scene, with a sketch of which, taken on the occasion, I am allowed to embellish this volume, may compare with Mrs. Gaskell's description of the *château* and its surroundings, which cannot have changed very much since Madame de Sévigné looked upon them (especially as in her eyes its chief beauties lay in its *parterre* and its *parc*), the more elaborate

picture drawn by Gaston Boissier, in his exquisite little monograph in the "Grands Ecrivains Français" series. Should any of my readers turn to that book, I think they can hardly fail to be attracted by what is said in it of the way in which Madame de Sévigné looked upon, and treated nature. She deliberately absorbed herself in it; so that one spring, after having observed and noted every detail of the return of life in bush and tree, she could sit down, and with "amusing confidence" remark: "*Il me semble qu'en cas de besoin je saurais bien faire un printemps.*" Like her favourite Madame de Sévigné, whose life, as we know, she purposed to have written, and would have written with no common inner sympathy, Mrs. Gaskell could write as she saw, and the fresh springtide, like the golden summer and the chill winter, transferred themselves to her page as they took possession of her mind. "The quietness of all things," she writes on a dark night at Avignon in the solitude of her lofty chamber, where she has been reading the narrative of a fearful domestic tragedy of long ago, "the dead stillness of the hour, has made me realise all the facts deposed to, as if they had happened to-day."

The associations of the past then, whether grave or gay—the grim memories of the Revolution which always seem to have haunted Mrs. Gaskell in Paris, or in thinking of Paris—and the irrecoverably pleasant customs which are what we all prefer to remember of the *ancien régime*—add both interest and distinction to these papers. But the Marquise de Villette, and Marly, and the conscientious Robespierre, and the witty Prince de Ligne themselves, are but shadows of the past; it is only those who live for us in their writings to whom we are drawn as to contemporaries and friends. There is, however, in these papers at least one most interesting portrait (for the gracious figure of Montalembert only flits across the scene) which Mrs. Gaskell was enabled to paint from the life, though it was not more than a year after their meeting that, in the words of the late Sir

Mountstuart Grant-Duff—words which must have been used by many other of her friends—Madame de Circourt was "released from her long martyrdom." Sainte-Beuve, whom the English diarist quotes, spoke of her as "torn away from Parisian society and her friends of every country. All who have known and been admitted to a share in the trueness of her heart and her intellect, will understand the significance of this loss and the gap which it leaves behind it." And he sums up her social gifts and charms in words which I will venture to translate, as specially germane to Mrs. Gaskell's own tribute:

"The special feature of Madame de Circourt's *salon* was that intellect gave the right of admission to it as by a kind of freedom of the city. Pious as she was and firmly fixed in her beliefs, no prejudice stood in her way, so soon as she had become aware that she had to do with a man of mind and of talent. Whatever might be your political associations or your philosophical starting-point, a friendly and sympathetic welcome awaited you from that armchair, to which for years she had been confined by cruel sufferings concealed beneath an irresistible grace and an unchangeable art of sociability."

Mrs. Gaskell, as was to be expected, recognised not only the exquisite charm of Madame de Circourt's presence, but the final cause of that charm. "Is not Christianity," she asks, "the very core of the heart of all gracious courtesy?" And she appeals to Elizabethan authority for a quaint way of stating this profound truth. But she might have gone further back—to Chaucer at all events—and recalled the noble lines:

> "Crist wol we claime of him our gentillesse,
> Not of our elders for hir old richesse;"

it was their virtuous living which made them to be called gentlemen.*

* A curious contrast (on which it is necessary to dwell) suggests itself with an earlier Parisian acquaintance which, on a visit made some years earlier, Mrs. Gaskell had made, likewise through her friend Madame Mohl. On March 23, 1855, Prosper Mérimée writes to Mrs. Nassau Senior the younger, with whom he had some little time before

Introduction

The bright little paper entitled "The Shah's English Gardener" is, thanks to good offices already acknowledged in my Prefatory Note, here for the first time reprinted from "Household Words," where it made its original appearance on June 19, 1852. It therefore belongs to an early period in Mrs. Gaskell's literary life; and, indeed, carries us back to the days of one of her earliest stories. For Teddesley (near Penkridge in Staffordshire), where Mrs. Gaskell "interviewed" Mr. Burton, formerly head-gardener to Shah Nasr-ed-Din, "King of Kings", was the country-seat of Lord Hatherton, who married the beautiful widow, Mrs. Davenport, of Capesthorne in Cheshire (see Introduction to "The Sexton's Hero" in Vol. I. of this edition). Mr. Burton's not very sympathetic account of the "reforming" Shah's restricted interest in his own household affairs is worth reading even at the present day, when Teheran, which (in Lancashire phrase) he "beautified" in 1870, has become so much better known, and when his successor is a personage familiar, not only to the West End, but to the City. Indeed, it was in a Scottish garden, not three miles from where I write, that, by a whimsical coincidence, I had some years ago the unexpected honour of being present at the reception of H.M. the Shah.

entered into a correspondence, and who had repeatedly urged him to read Mrs. Gaskell's "Ruth", then recently published: "I have read 'Ruth', and, what is more, I have seen the author, whom Madame Mohl is to bring to me to-morrow to drink *du thé jaune*." He avows that his sensibility, always far more affected by the death of the heroine of a book than it would be by that of a man by his side, had given him (as our younger generation would say) a bad time with "Ruth," whose fate he had foreseen from page 1. He renders justice to the talent and truth to nature revealed by Mrs. Gaskell's work; but then, *more suo*, he goes off into the cynical comment that all would have been well with Ruth, if she had had more money in her purse. His statement that Mrs. Gaskell had told him of "Ruth" having been publicly burnt "in the name of immorality" must be taken with a very large grain of salt. (See "Prosper Mérimée", by the Comte d' Haussonville, Paris, 1885.)

More than two-thirds of the story, here for the first time reprinted under the title of "Crowley Castle", had been put into type for the present edition from a MS. left by Mrs. Gaskell, when it was identified with the first of the tales included in the 1863 Christmas number of "All the Year Round", still so well remembered for Charles Dickens' Introduction to "Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings." Mrs. Gaskell's tale there had the place of honour as an account of "How the First Floor went to Crowley Castle", prefaced by the single sentence—

> "I have come back to London, Major, possessed by a family-story that I have picked up in the country."

I have here printed the opening sentences as they appear in the MS.; the rest almost exactly as it stands in "All the Year Round." There is no material difference between the MS., so far as it goes, and the printed text, though the latter "every here and there" shows signs of compression. The MS. comes to a close, just before Theresa's indignation against what she deems the apathy of Bessy enters into a violent phase of which Victorine malignantly takes note, and before the height of the interest is reached. But the constructive skill with which the ultimate development of the plot is prepared, is notable from the first; and this, together with the familiarity with French surroundings exhibited in the earlier part of the narrative, would have sufficed to show that it belongs to a relatively advanced period of Mrs. Gaskell's literary work. Yet in her later years she hardly ever wrote anything so entirely without the ingredient of humour which is wanting to none of her larger productions, in any period of her life. Indeed, Victorine, the devoted but designing French lady's-maid, belongs to a sphere of fiction in which Mrs. Gaskell hardly ever set foot. The contrast between Theresa and Bessy, on the other hand, was one of those conflicts of personality which no hand was better able to delineate with fidelity to

nature than her own; but the conditions of her task in this case allowed of no elaboration of detail.

In conclusion, I think that the readers of this edition will be pleased by the inclusion in it of two fragments of "Ghost Stories", found, without date or other clue to the period of their production, among Mrs. Gaskell's papers, and now for the first time put into print. The attraction exercised upon her by mysterious incidents suggestive of the supernatural has already been sufficiently illustrated; but these fragments are, each in its own way, written with so much simple grace, that they will, I think, give to others the same pleasure as that which they give to myself. The earlier of the pair is enlivened by a sly humour which, one might almost suppose, would have stood the night-capped traveller in good stead during the nocturnal interview awaiting her; the second adds a delightful page, descriptive of one of those dales—in North Lancashire or thereabouts—which Mrs. Gaskell loved, and its moorland surroundings.

A. W. W.

September, 1906.

COUSIN PHILLIS

PART I

It is a great thing for a lad, when he is first turned into the independence of lodgings. I do not think I ever was so satisfied and proud in my life as when, at seventeen, I sate down in a little three-cornered room above a pastry-cook's shop in the county-town of Eltham. My father had left me that afternoon, after delivering himself of a few plain precepts, strongly expressed, for my guidance in the new course of life on which I was entering. I was to be a clerk under the engineer who had undertaken to make the little branch line from Eltham to Hornby. My father had got me this situation, which was in a position rather above his own in life; or perhaps I should say, above the station in which he was born and bred; for he was raising himself every year in men's consideration and respect. He was a mechanic by trade; but he had some inventive genius, and a great deal of perseverance, and had devised several valuable improvements in railway machinery. He did not do this for profit, though, as was reasonable, what came in the natural course of things was acceptable; he worked out his ideas, because, as he said, "until he could put them into shape, they plagued him by night and by day." But this is enough about my dear father; it is a good thing for a country where there are many like him. He was a sturdy Independent by descent and conviction; and this it was, I believe, which made him place me in the lodgings at the pastry-cook's. The shop was kept by the two sisters of our minister at home; and this was considered as a sort of safeguard to my

morals, when I was turned loose upon the temptations of the county-town, with a salary of thirty pounds a year.

My father had given up two precious days, and put on his Sunday clothes, in order to bring me to Eltham, and accompany me, first to the office, to introduce me to my new master (who was under some obligations to my father for a suggestion), and next to take me to call on the Independent minister of the little congregation at Eltham. And then he left me; and, though sorry to part with him, I now began to taste with relish the pleasure of being my own master. I unpacked the hamper that my mother had provided me with, and smelt the pots of preserve with all the delight of a possessor who might break into their contents at any time he pleased. I handled, and weighed in my fancy, the home-cured ham, which seemed to promise me interminable feasts; and, above all, there was the fine savour of knowing that I might eat of these dainties when I liked, at my sole will, not dependent on the pleasure of any one else, however indulgent. I stowed my eatables away in the little corner cupboard—that room was all corners, and everything was placed in a corner, the fireplace, the window, the cupboard; I myself seemed to be the only thing in the middle, and there was hardly room for me. The table was made of a folding leaf under the window, and the window looked out upon the market-place; so the studies for the prosecution of which my father had brought himself to pay extra for a sitting-room for me ran a considerable chance of being diverted from books to men and women. I was to have my meals with the two elderly Miss Dawsons in the little parlour behind the three-cornered shop downstairs—my breakfasts and dinners at least; for, as my hours in an evening were likely to be uncertain, my tea or supper was to be an independent meal.

Then, after this pride and satisfaction, came a sense of desolation. I had never been from home before, and I was an only child; and, though my father's spoken maxim had been, "Spare the rod, and spoil the child," yet,

unconsciously, his heart had yearned after me, and his ways towards me were more tender than he knew, or would have approved of in himself, could he have known. My mother, who never professed sternness, was far more severe than my father; perhaps my boyish faults annoyed her more; for I remember, now that I have written the above words, how she pleaded for me once in my riper years, when I had really offended against my father's sense of right.

But I have nothing to do with that now. It is about cousin Phillis that I am going to write, and as yet I am far enough from even saying who cousin Phillis was.

For some months after I was settled in Eltham, the new employment in which I was engaged—the new independence of my life—occupied all my thoughts. I was at my desk by eight o'clock, home to dinner at one, back at the office by two. The afternoon work was more uncertain than the morning's; it might be the same, or it might be that I had to accompany Mr. Holdsworth, the managing engineer, to some point on the line between Eltham and Hornby. This I always enjoyed, because of the variety, and because of the country we traversed (which was very wild and pretty), and because I was thrown into companionship with Mr. Holdsworth, who held the position of hero in my boyish mind. He was a young man of five-and-twenty or so, and was in a station above mine, both by birth and education; and he had travelled on the Continent, and wore mustachios and whiskers of a somewhat foreign fashion. I was proud of being seen with him. He was really a fine fellow, in a good number of ways, and I might have fallen into much worse hands.

Every Saturday I wrote home, telling of my weekly doings—my father had insisted upon this; but there was so little variety in my life that I often found it hard work to fill a letter. On Sundays I went twice to chapel, up a dark narrow entry, to hear droning hymns, and long prayers, and a still longer sermon, preached to a small congregation, of which I was, by nearly a score of years, the youngest member. Occasionally, Mr. Peters, the minister, would ask

me home to tea after the second service. I dreaded the honour; for I usually sate on the edge of my chair all the evening, and answered solemn questions, put in a deep bass voice, until household prayer-time came, at eight o'clock, when Mrs. Peters came in, smoothing down her apron, and the maid-of-all-work followed, and first a sermon, and then a chapter, was read, and a long impromptu prayer followed, till some instinct told Mr. Peters that supper-time had come, and we rose from our knees with hunger for our predominant feeling. Over supper, the minister did unbend a little into one or two ponderous jokes, as if to show me that ministers were men, after all. And then, at ten o'clock, I went home, and enjoyed my long-repressed yawns in the three-cornered room before going to bed.

Dinah and Hannah Dawson, so their names were put on the board above the shop-door—I always called them Miss Dawson and Miss Hannah—considered these visits of mine to Mr. Peters as the greatest honour a young man could have; and evidently thought that if, after such privileges, I did not work out my salvation, I was a sort of modern Judas Iscariot. On the contrary, they shook their heads over my intercourse with Mr. Holdsworth. He had been so kind to me in many ways, that when I cut into my ham, I hovered over the thought of asking him to tea in my room; more especially as the annual fair was being held in Eltham market-place, and the sight of the booths, the merry-go-rounds, the wild-beast shows, and such country pomps, was (as I thought at seventeen) very attractive. But, when I ventured to allude to my wish in even distant terms, Miss Hannah caught me up, and spoke of the sinfulness of such sights, and something about wallowing in the mire, and then vaulted into France, and spoke evil of the nation, and all who had ever set foot therein; till, seeing that her anger was concentrating itself into a point, and that that point was Mr. Holdsworth, I thought it would be better to finish my breakfast, and make what haste I could out of the sound of her voice. I rather wondered afterwards to hear her and

Miss Dawson counting up their weekly profits with glee, and saying that a pastry-cook's shop in the corner of the market-place, in Eltham-fair week, was no such bad thing. However, I never ventured to ask Mr. Holdsworth to my lodgings.

There is not much to tell about this first year of mine at Eltham. But when I was nearly nineteen, and beginning to think of whiskers on my own account, I came to know cousin Phillis, whose very existence had been unknown to me till then. Mr. Holdsworth and I had been out to Heathbridge for a day, working hard. Heathbridge was near Hornby, for our line of railway was above half finished. Of course a day's outing was a great thing to tell about in my weekly letters; and I fell to describing the country—a fault I was not often guilty of. I told my father of the bogs, all over wild myrtle and soft moss, and shaking ground, over which we had to carry our line; and how Mr. Holdsworth and I had gone for our mid-day meals—for we had to stay here for two days and a night—to a pretty village hard-by, Heathbridge proper; and how I hoped we should often have to go there, for the shaking, uncertain ground was puzzling our engineers—one end of the line going up as soon as the other was weighted down. (I had no thought for the shareholders' interests, as may be seen; we had to make a new line on firmer ground, before the junction railway was completed.) I told all this at great length, thankful to fill up my paper. By return-letter, I heard that a second cousin of my mother's was married to the Independent minister of Hornby, Ebenezer Holman by name, and lived at Heathbridge proper: the very Heathbridge I had described—or so my mother believed; for she had never seen her cousin Phillis Green, who was something of an heiress (my father believed), being her father's only child; and old Thomas Green had owned an estate of near upon fifty acres, which must have come to his daughter. My mother's feeling of kinship seemed to have been strongly stirred by the mention of Heathbridge; for my father said she desired me, if ever I went thither again, to make inquiry for the Reverend

Ebenezer Holman; and, if indeed he lived there, I was further to ask if he had not married one Phillis Green, and, if both these questions were answered in the affirmative, I was to go and introduce myself as the only child of Margaret Manning, born Moneypenny. I was enraged at myself for having named Heathbridge at all, when I found what it was drawing down upon me. One Independent minister, as I said to myself, was enough for any man; and here I knew (that is to say, I had been catechised on Sabbath-mornings by) Mr. Hunter, our minister at home; and I had had to be civil to old Peters at Eltham, and behave myself for five hours running, whenever he asked me to tea at his house; and now, just as I felt the free air blowing about me up at Heathbridge, I was to ferret out another minister, and I should perhaps have to be catechised by him, or else asked to tea at his house. Besides, I did not like pushing myself upon strangers, who perhaps had never heard of my mother's name, and, such an odd name as it was—Money-penny; and, if they had, had never cared more for her than she had for them, apparently, until this unlucky mention of Heathbridge.

Still, I would not disobey my parents in such a trifle, however irksome it might be. So, the next time our business took me to Heathbridge, and we were dining in the little sanded inn-parlour, I took the opportunity of Mr. Holds-worth's being out of the room, and asked the questions, which I was bidden to ask, of the rosy-cheeked maid. I was either unintelligible or she was stupid; for she said she did not know, but would ask master; and, of course, the landlord came in to understand what it was I wanted to know; and I had to bring out all my stammering inquiries before Mr. Holdsworth, who would never have attended to them, I dare say, if I had not blushed and blundered, and made such a fool of myself.

"Yes," the landlord said, "the Hope Farm was in Heathbridge proper, and the owner's name was Holman, and he was an Independent minister, and, as far as the

landlord could tell, his wife's Christian name was Phillis; anyhow, her maiden name was Green."

"Relations of yours?" asked Mr. Holdsworth.

"No, sir—only my mother's second cousins. Yes, I suppose they are relations. But I never saw them in my life."

"The Hope Farm is not a stone's throw from here," said the officious landlord, going to the window. "If you carry your eye over yon bed of hollyhocks, over the damson-trees in the orchard yonder, you may see a stack of queer-like stone chimneys. Them is the Hope Farm chimneys; it's an old place, though Holman keeps it in good order."

Mr. Holdsworth had risen from the table with more promptitude than I had, and was standing by the window, looking. At the landlord's last words, he turned round, smiling—"It is not often that parsons know how to keep land in order, is it?"

"Beg pardon, sir, but I must speak as I find; and minister Holman—we call the Church clergyman here 'parson,' sir; he would be a bit jealous, if he heard a Dissenter called parson—minister Holman knows what he's about, as well as e'er a farmer in the neighbourhood. He gives up five days a week to his own work, and two to the Lord's; and it is difficult to say which he works hardest at. He spends Saturday and Sunday a-writing sermons and a-visiting his flock at Hornby; and at five o'clock on Monday morning he'll be guiding his plough, in the Hope Farm yonder, just as well as if he could neither read nor write. But your dinner will be getting cold, gentlemen."

So we went back to table. After a while, Mr. Holdsworth broke the silence—"If I were you, Manning, I'd look up these relations of yours. You can go and see what they're like, while we're waiting for Dobson's estimates; and I'll smoke a cigar in the garden meanwhile."

"Thank you, sir. But I don't know them, and I don't think I want to know them."

"What did you ask all those questions for, then?" said

he, looking quickly up at me. He had no notion of doing or saying things without a purpose. I did not answer; so he continued—"Make up your mind, and go off and see what this farmer-minister is like, and come back and tell me—I should like to hear."

I was so in the habit of yielding to his authority, or influence; that I never thought of resisting, but went on my errand; though I remember feeling as if I would rather have had my head cut off. The landlord, who had evidently taken an interest in the event of our discussion, in a way that country landlords have, accompanied me to the house-door and gave me repeated directions, as if I was likely to miss my way in two hundred yards. But I listened to him, for I was glad of the delay, to screw up my courage for the effort of facing unknown people and introducing myself. I went along the lane, I recollect, switching at all the taller roadside weeds; till, after a turn or two, I found myself close in front of the Hope Farm. There was a garden between the house and the shady, grassy lane; I afterwards found that this garden was called the court: perhaps because there was a low wall round it, with an iron railing on the top of the wall, and two great gates, between pillars crowned with stone balls, for a state entrance to the flagged path leading up to the front door. It was not the habit of the place to go in either by these great gates or by the front door; the gates, indeed, were locked, as I found, though the door stood wide open. I had to go round by a side-path, slightly worn, on a broad, grassy way, which led past the court-wall, past a horse-mount, half covered with stone-crop and a little wild yellow fumitory, to another door—"the curate," as I found it was termed by the master of the house, while the front door, "handsome and all for show", was termed "the rector." I knocked with my hand upon the "curate" door; a tall girl, about my own age, as I thought, came and opened it, and stood there silent, waiting to know my errand. I see her now—cousin Philis. The westering sun shone full upon her, and made a slanting stream of light into the room within.

She was dressed in dark blue cotton of some kind, up to her throat, down to her wrists, with a little frill of the same, wherever it touched her white skin. And such a white skin as it was! I have never seen the like. She had light hair, nearer yellow than any other colour. She looked me steadily in the face with large, quiet eyes, wondering, but untroubled by the sight of a stranger. I thought it odd that so old, so full-grown as she was, she should wear a pinafore over her gown.

Before I had quite made up my mind what to say in reply to her mute inquiry of what I wanted there, a woman's voice called out, "Who is it, Phillis? If it is any one for butter-milk, send them round to the back door."

I thought I would rather speak to the owner of that voice than to the girl before me; so I passed her, and stood at the entrance of a room, hat in hand; for this side-door opened straight into the hall or house-place, where the family sate when work was done. There was a brisk little woman, of forty or so, ironing some huge muslin cravats under the light of a long vine-shaded casement window. She looked at me distrustfully till I began to speak. "My name is Paul Manning," said I; but I saw she did not know the name. "My mother's name was Moneypenny," said I—"Margaret Moneypenny."

"And she married one John Manning, of Birmingham," said Mrs. Holman eagerly. "And you'll be her son. Sit down! I am right glad to see you. To think of your being Margaret's son! Why, she was almost a child not so long ago. Well, to be sure, it is five-and-twenty years ago. And what brings you into these parts?"

She sate down herself, as if oppressed by her curiosity as to all the five-and-twenty years that had passed by since she had seen my mother. Her daughter Phillis took up her knitting—a long grey worsted man's-stocking, I remember—and knitted away without looking at her work. I felt that the steady gaze of those deep grey eyes was upon me, though once, when I stealthily raised mine to hers, she was examining something on the wall above my head.

When I had answered all my cousin Holman's questions, she heaved a long breath, and said, "To think of Margaret Moneypenny's boy being in our house! I wish the minister was here. Phillis, in what field is thy father to-day?"

"In the five-acre; they are beginning to cut the corn."

"He'll not like being sent for, then; else I should have liked you to have seen the minister. But the five-acre is a good step off. You shall have a glass of wine and a bit of cake, before you stir from this house, though. You're bound to go, you say; or else the minister comes in mostly when the men have their four o'clock."

"I must go—I ought to have been off before now."

"Here, then, Phillis, take the keys." She gave her daughter some whispered directions, and Phillis left the room.

"She is my cousin, is she not?" I asked. I knew she was; but somehow I wanted to talk of her, and did not know how to begin.

"Yes—Phillis Holman. She is our only child—now."

Either from that "now," or from a strange momentary wistfulness in her eyes, I knew that there had been more children, who were now dead.

"How old is cousin Phillis?" said I, scarcely venturing on the new name, it seemed too prettily familiar for me to call her by it; but cousin Holman took no notice of it, answering straight to the purpose.

"Seventeen last May-day; but the minister does not like to hear me calling it 'May-day'," said she, checking herself with a little awe. "Phillis was seventeen on the first day of May last," she repeated in an emended edition.

"And I am nineteen in another month," thought I to myself; I don't know why.

Then Phillis came in, carrying a tray with wine and cake upon it.

"We keep a house-servant," said cousin Holman; "but it is churning-day, and she is busy." It was meant as a little proud apology for her daughter's being the handmaiden.

"I like doing it, mother," said Phillis, in her grave, full voice.

I felt as if I were somebody in the Old Testament—who, I could not recollect—being served and waited upon by the daughter of the host. Was I like Abraham's steward, when Rebekah gave him to drink at the well? I thought Isaac had not gone the pleasantest way to work in winning him a wife. But Phillis never thought about such things. She was a stately, gracious young woman, in the dress, and with the simplicity, of a child.

As I had been taught, I drank to the health of my new-found cousin and her husband; and then I ventured to name my cousin Phillis with a little bow of my head towards her; but I was too awkward to look and see how she took my compliment. "I must go, now," said I, rising.

Neither of the women had thought of sharing in the wine; cousin Holman had broken a bit of cake for form's sake.

"I wish the minister had been within," said his wife, rising too. Secretly I was very glad he was not. I did not take kindly to ministers in those days; and I thought he must be a particular kind of man, by his objecting to the term "May-day." But, before I went, cousin Holman made me promise that I would come back on the Saturday following and spend Sunday with them: when I should see something of "the minister."

"Come on Friday, if you can," were her last words as she stood at the curate-door, shading her eyes from the sinking sun with her hand.

Inside the house sate cousin Phillis, her golden hair, her dazzling complexion, lighting up the corner of the vine-shadowed room. She had not risen, when I bade her good-bye; she had looked at me straight, as she said her tranquil words of farewell.

I found Mr. Holdsworth down at the line, hard at work superintending. As soon as he had a pause, he said, "Well, Manning, what are the new cousins like? How do preaching

and farming seem to get on together? If the minister turns out to be practical as well as reverend, I shall begin to respect him."

But he hardly attended to my answer, he was so much more occupied with directing his workpeople. Indeed, my answer did not come very readily; and the most distinct part of it was the mention of the invitation that had been given me.

"Oh! of course you can go—and on Friday, too, if you like; there is no reason why not this week; and you've done a long spell of work this time, old fellow."

I thought that I did not want to go on Friday; but, when the day came, I found that I should prefer going to staying away; so I availed myself of Mr. Holdsworth's permission, and went over to Hope Farm some time in the afternoon, a little later than my last visit. I found the "curate" open, to admit the soft September air, so tempered by the warmth of the sun that it was warmer out of doors than in, although the wooden log lay smouldering in front of a heap of hot ashes on the hearth. The vine-leaves over the window had a tinge more yellow, their edges were here and there scorched and browned; there was no ironing about, and cousin Holman sate just outside the house, mending a shirt. Phillis was at her knitting indoors: it seemed as if she had been at it all the week. The many-speckled fowls were pecking about in the farmyard beyond, and the milk-cans glittered with brightness, hung out to sweeten. The court was so full of flowers that they crept out upon the low-covered wall and horse-mount, and were even to be found self-sown upon the turf that bordered the path to the back of the house. I fancied that my Sunday coat was scented for days afterwards by the bushes of sweetbriar and the fraxinella that perfumed the air. From time to time, cousin Holman put her hand into a covered basket at her feet, and threw handfuls of corn down for the pigeons that cooed and fluttered in the air around, in expectation of this treat.

I had a thorough welcome, as soon as she saw me.

"Now, this is kind—this is right-down friendly," shaking my hand warmly. "Phillis, your cousin Manning is come!"

"Call me Paul, will you?" said I; "they call me so at home, and Manning in the office."

"Well; Paul, then. Your room is all ready for you, Paul; for, as I said to the minister, 'I'll have it ready, whether he comes o' Friday or not.' And the minister said he must go up to the Ash-field, whether you were to come or not; but he would come home betimes, to see if you were here. I'll show you to your room; and you can wash the dust off a bit."

After I came down, I think she did not quite know what to do with me; or she might think that I was dull; or she might have work to do in which I hindered her; for she called Phillis, and bade her put on her bonnet, and go with me to the Ash-field, and find father. So we set off, I in a little flutter of a desire to make myself agreeable, but wishing that my companion were not quite so tall; for she was above me in height. While I was wondering how to begin our conversation, she took up the words.

"I suppose, cousin Paul, you have to be very busy at your work all day long, in general?"

"Yes, we have to be in the office at half-past eight; and we have an hour for dinner, and then we go at it again till eight or nine."

"Then you have not much time for reading?"

"No," said I, with a sudden consciousness that I did not make the most of what leisure I had.

"No more have I. Father always gets an hour before going a-field in the mornings; but mother does not like me to get up so early."

"My mother is always wanting me to get up earlier, when I am at home."

"What time do you get up?"

"Oh!—ah!—sometimes half-past six; not often, though"; for I remembered only twice that I had done so during the past summer.

She turned her head, and looked at me.

"Father is up at three; and so was mother till she was ill. I should like to be up at four."

"Your father up at three! Why, what has he to do at that hour?"

"What has he not to do? He has his private exercise in his own room; he always rings the great bell which calls the men to milking; he rouses up Betty, our maid; as often as not, he gives the horses their feed before the man is up—for Jem, who takes care of the horses, is an old man; and father is always loth to disturb him; he looks at the calves, and the shoulders, heels, traces, chaff, and corn, before the horses go a-field; he has often to whip-cord the plough-whips; he sees the hogs fed; he looks into the swill-tubs, and writes his orders for what is wanted for food for man and beast; yes, and for fuel, too. And then, if he has a bit of time to spare, he comes in and reads with me—but only English; we keep Latin for the evenings, that we may have time to enjoy it; and then he calls in the man to breakfast, and cuts the boys' bread and cheese, and sees their wooden bottles filled, and sends them off to their work;—and by this time it is half-past six, and we have our breakfast. There is father!" she exclaimed, pointing out to me a man in his shirt-sleeves, taller by the head than the other two with whom he was working. We only saw him through the leaves of the ash-trees growing in the hedge, and I thought I must be confusing the figures, or mistaken: that man still looked like a very powerful labourer, and had none of the precise demureness of appearance which I had always imagined was the characteristic of a minister. It was the Reverend Ebenezer Holman, however. He gave us a nod as we entered the stubble-field; and I think he would have come to meet us, but that he was in the middle of giving some directions to his men. I could see that Phillis was built more after his type than her mother's. He, like his daughter, was largely made, and of a fair, ruddy complexion, whereas hers was brilliant and delicate. His hair had been

yellow or sandy, but now was grizzled. Yet his grey hairs betokened no failure in strength. I never saw a more powerful man—deep chest, lean flanks, well-planted head. By this time we were nearly up to him; and he interrupted himself and stepped forwards, holding out his hand to me, but addressing Phillis.

"Well, my lass, this is cousin Manning, I suppose. Wait a minute, young man, and I'll put on my coat, and give you a decorous and formal welcome. But—— Ned Hall, there ought to be a water-furrow across this land: it's a nasty, stiff, clayey, dauby bit of ground, and thou and I must fall to, come next Monday—I beg your pardon, cousin Manning—and there's old Jem's cottage wants a bit of thatch; you can do that job to-morrow, while I am busy." Then, suddenly changing the tone of his deep bass voice to an odd suggestion of chapels and preachers, he added, "Now I will give out the psalm: 'Come all harmonious tongues,' to be sung to 'Mount Ephraim' tune."

He lifted his spade in his hand, and began to beat time with it; the two labourers seemed to know both words and music, though I did not; and so did Phillis: her rich voice followed her father's, as he set the tune; and the men came in with more uncertainty, but still harmoniously. Phillis looked at me once or twice, with a little surprise at my silence; but I did not know the words. There we five stood, bareheaded, excepting Phillis, in the tawny stubble-field, from which all the shocks of corn had not yet been carried—a dark wood on one side, where the wood-pigeons were cooing; blue distance, seen through the ash-trees, on the other. Somehow, I think that, if I had known the words, and could have sung, my throat would have been choked up by the feeling of the unaccustomed scene.

The hymn was ended, and the men had drawn off, before I could stir. I saw the minister beginning to put on his coat, and looking at me with friendly inspection in his gaze, before I could rouse myself.

"I daresay you railway gentlemen don't wind up the day

with singing a psalm together," said he; "but it is not a bad practice—not a bad practice. We have had it a bit earlier to-day for hospitality's sake—that's all."

I had nothing particular to say to this, though I was thinking a great deal. From time to time, I stole a look at my companion. His coat was black, and so was his waistcoat; neck-cloth he had none, his strong full throat being bare above the snow-white shirt. He wore drab-coloured knee-breeches, grey worsted stockings (I thought I knew the maker), and strong-nailed shoes. He carried his hat in his hand, as if he liked to feel the coming breeze lifting his hair. After a while, I saw that the father took hold of the daughter's hand; and so they, holding each other, went along towards home. We had to cross a lane. In it there were two little children—one lying prone on the grass in a passion of crying; the other standing stock still, with its finger in its mouth, the large tears slowly rolling down its cheeks for sympathy. The cause of their distress was evident; there was a broken brown pitcher, and a little pool of spilt milk on the road.

"Hollo! hollo! What's all this?" said the minister. "Why, what have you been about, Tommy?" lifting the little petticoated lad, who was lying sobbing, with one vigorous arm. Tommy looked at him with surprise in his round eyes, but no affright—they were evidently old acquaintances.

"Mammy's jug!" said he at last, beginning to cry afresh.

"Well! and will crying piece mammy's jug, or pick up spilt milk? How did you manage it, Tommy?"

"He" (jerking his head at the other) "and me was running races."

"Tommy said he could beat me," put in the other.

"Now, I wonder what will make you two silly lads mind, and not run races again, with a pitcher of milk between you," said the minister, as if musing. "I might flog you, and so save mammy the trouble; for I daresay she'll do it,

if I don't." The fresh burst of whimpering from both showed the probability of this. "Or I might take you to the Hope Farm, and give you some more milk; but then you'd be running races again, and my milk would follow that to the ground, and make another white pool. I think the flogging would be best—don't you?"

"We would never run races no more," said the elder of the two.

"Then you'd not be boys; you'd be angels."

"No, we shouldn't."

"Why not?"

They looked into each other's eyes for an answer to this puzzling question. At length, one said, "Angels is dead folk."

"Come; we'll not get too deep into theology. What do you think of my lending you a tin can with a lid, to carry the milk home in? That would not break, at any rate; though I would not answer for the milk not spilling, if you ran races. That's it!"

He had dropped his daughter's hand, and now held out each of his to the little fellows. Phillis and I followed, and listened to the prattle which the minister's companions now poured out to him, and which he was evidently enjoying. At a certain point, there was a sudden burst of the tawny, ruddy evening landscape. The minister turned round, and quoted a line or two of Latin.

"It's wonderful," said he, "how exactly Virgil has hit the enduring epithets, nearly two thousand years ago, and in Italy; and yet how it describes to a T what is now lying before us in the parish of Heathbridge, county ——, England."

"I daresay it does," said I, all aglow with shame; for I had forgotten the little Latin I ever knew.

The minister shifted his eyes to Phillis's face; it mutely gave him back the sympathetic appreciation that I, in my ignorance, could not bestow.

"Oh! this is worse than the catechism," thought I; "that was only remembering words."

"Phillis, lass, thou must go home with these lads, and

tell their mother all about the race and the milk. Mammy must always know the truth," now speaking to the children. "And tell her, too, from me that I have got the best birch-rod in the parish; and that, if she ever thinks her children want a flogging, she must bring them to me, and, if I think they deserve it, I'll give it them better than she can." So Phillis led the children towards the dairy, somewhere in the back-yard; and I followed the minister in through the "curate" into the house-place.

"Their mother," said he, "is a bit of a vixen, and apt to punish her children without rhyme or reason. I try to keep the parish-rod as well as the parish-bull."

He sate down in the three-cornered chair by the fireside, and looked around the empty room.

"Where's the missus?" said he to himself. But she was there in a minute; it was her regular plan to give him his welcome home—by a look, by a touch, nothing more—as soon as she could after his return, and he had missed her now. Regardless of my presence, he went over the day's doings to her; and then, getting up, he said he must go and make himself "reverend," and that then we would have a cup of tea in the parlour. The parlour was a large room, with two casemented windows on the other side of the broad flagged passage leading from the rector-door to the wide staircase, with its shallow, polished oaken steps, on which no carpet was ever laid. The parlour-floor was covered in the middle by a home-made carpeting of needlework and list. One or two quaint family pictures of the Holman family hung round the walls; the fire-grate and irons were much ornamented with brass; and on a table against the wall between the windows, a great beau-pot of flowers was placed upon the folio volumes of Matthew Henry's Bible. It was a compliment to me to use this room, and I tried to be grateful for it; but we never had our meals there after that first day, and I was glad of it; for the large house-place, living-room, dining-room, whichever you might like to call it, was twice as comfortable and cheerful. There

was a rug in front of the great large fireplace, and an oven by the grate, and a crook, with the kettle hanging from it, over the bright wood-fire; everything that ought to be black and polished in that room was black and polished; and the flags, and window-curtains, and such things as were to be white and clean, were just spotless in their purity. Opposite to the fireplace, extending the whole length of the room, was an oaken shovel-board, with the right incline for a skilful player to send the weights into the prescribed space. There were baskets of white work about, and a small shelf of books hung against the wall—books used for reading, and not for propping up a beau-pot of flowers. I took down one or two of those books once when I was left alone in the house-place on the first evening—Virgil, Cæsar, a Greek grammar—oh, dear! ah, me! and Phillis Holman's name in each of them! I shut them up, and put them back in their places, and walked as far away from the book-shelf as I could. Yes, and I gave my cousin Phillis a wide berth, although she was sitting at her work quietly enough, and her hair was looking more golden, her dark eyelashes longer, her round pillar of a throat whiter, than ever. We had done tea, and we had returned into the house-place, that the minister might smoke his pipe without fear of contaminating the drab damask window-curtains of the parlour. He had made himself "reverend" by putting on one of the voluminous white muslin neckcloths that I had seen cousin Holman ironing, that first visit I had paid to the Hope Farm, and by making one or two other unimportant changes in his dress. He sate looking steadily at me; but whether he saw me or not I cannot tell. At the time, I fancied that he did, and was gauging me in some unknown fashion in his secret mind. Every now and then, he took his pipe out of his mouth, knocked out the ashes, and asked me some fresh question. As long as these related to my acquirements or my reading, I shuffled uneasily and did not know what to answer. By-and-by, he got round to the more practical subject of rail-roads, and on this I was more at home. I really had taken

an interest in my work; nor would Mr. Holdsworth, indeed, have kept me in his employment, if I had not given my mind as well as my time to it; and I was, besides, full of the difficulties which beset us just then, owing to our not being able to find a steady bottom on the Heathbridge moss, over which we wished to carry our line. In the midst of all my eagerness in speaking about this, I could not help being struck with the extreme pertinence of his questions. I do not mean that he did not show ignorance of many of the details of engineering: that was to have been expected; but on the premises he had got hold of he thought clearly and reasoned logically. Phillis—so like him as she was both in body and mind—kept stopping at her work and looking at me, trying to fully understand all that I said. I felt she did; and perhaps it made me take more pains in using clear expressions and arranging my words, than I otherwise should.

"She shall see I know something worth knowing, though it mayn't be her dead-and-gone languages," thought I.

"I see," said the minister at length. "I understand it all. You've a clear, good head of your own, my lad—choose how you came by it."

"From my father," said I proudly. "Have you not heard of his discovery of a new method of shunting? It was in the *Gazette*. It was patented. I thought every one had heard of Manning's patent winch."

"We don't know who invented the alphabet," said he, half-smiling, and taking up his pipe.

"No, I dare say not, sir," replied I, half-offended; "that's so long ago."

Puff—puff—puff.

"But your father must be a notable man. I heard of him once before; and it is not many a one fifty miles away whose fame reaches Heathbridge."

"My father is a notable man, sir. It is not me that says so; it is Mr. Holdsworth, and—and everybody."

"He is right to stand up for his father," said Cousin Holman, as if she were pleading for me.

I chafed inwardly, thinking that my father needed no one to stand up for him. He was man sufficient for himself.

"Yes—he is right," said the minister placidly. "Right, because it comes from his heart—right, too, as I believe, in point of fact. Else, there is many a young cockerel that will stand upon a dunghill and crow about his father, by way of making his own plumage to shine. I should like to know thy father," he went on, turning straight to me, with a kindly, frank look in his eyes.

But I was vexed, and would take no notice. Presently, having finished his pipe, he got up and left the room. Phillis put her work hastily down, and went after him. In a minute or two she returned, and sate down again. Not long after, and before I had quite recovered my good temper, he opened the door out of which he had passed, and called to me to come to him. I went across a narrow stone passage into a strange, many-cornered room, not ten feet in area, part study, part counting-house, looking into the farmyard; with a desk to sit at, a desk to stand at, a spittoon, a set of shelves with old divinity books upon them; another, smaller, filled with books on farriery, farming, manures, and such subjects, with pieces of paper containing memoranda stuck against the whitewashed walls with wafers, nails, pins, anything that came readiest to hand; a box of carpenter's tools on the floor, and some manuscripts in shorthand on the desk.

He turned round, half-laughing. "That foolish girl of mine thinks I have vexed you"—putting his large, powerful hand on my shoulder. "'Nay,' says I; 'kindly meant is kindly taken'—is it not so?"

"It was not quite, sir," replied I, vanquished by his manner; "but it shall be in future."

"Come, that's right. You and I shall be friends. Indeed, it's not many a one I would bring in here. But I was reading a book this morning, and I could not make it out; it is a book that was left here by mistake one day; I had subscribed to Brother Robinson's sermons; and I was glad to see this

instead of them, for, sermons though they be, they're . . . well, never mind! I took 'em both, and made my old coat do a bit longer; but all's fish that comes to my net. I have fewer books than leisure to read them, and I have a prodigious big appetite. Here it is."

It was a volume of stiff mechanics, involving many technical terms, and some rather deep mathematics. These last, which would have puzzled me, seemed easy enough to him; all that he wanted was the explanation of the technical words, which I could easily give.

While he was looking through the book, to find the places where he had been puzzled, my wandering eye caught on some of the papers on the wall, and I could not help reading one, which has stuck by me ever since. At first, it seemed a kind of weekly diary; but then I saw that the seven days were portioned out for special prayers and intercessions: Monday for his family, Tuesday for enemies, Wednesday for the Independent churches, Thursday for all other churches, Friday for persons afflicted, Saturday for his own soul, Sunday for all wanderers and sinners, that they might be brought home to the fold.

We were called back into the house-place to have supper. A door opening into the kitchen was opened; and all stood up in both rooms, while the minister, tall, large, one hand resting on the spread table, the other lifted up, said, in the deep voice that would have been loud, had it not been so full and rich, but with the peculiar accent or twang that I believe is considered devout by some people, "Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, let us do all to the glory of God."

The supper was an immense meat-pie. We of the house-place were helped first; then the minister hit the handle of his buckhorn carving-knife on the table once, and said—

"Now or never;" which meant, did any of us want any more; and, when we had all declined, either by silence or by words, he knocked twice with his knife on the table, and Betty came in through the open door, and carried off the

great dish to the kitchen, where an old man and a young one, and a help-girl, were awaiting their meal.

"Shut the door, if you will," said the minister to Betty.

"That's in honour of you," said cousin Holman, in a tone of satisfaction, as the door was shut. "When we've no stranger with us, the minister is so fond of keeping the door open, and talking to the men and maids, just as much as to Phillis and me."

"It brings us all together, like a household, just before we meet as a household in prayer," said he in explanation. "But to go back to what we were talking about—can you tell me of any simple book on dynamics that I could put in my pocket, and study a little at leisure times in the day?"

"'Leisure times,' father?" said Phillis, with a nearer approach to a smile than I had yet seen on her face.

"Yes; leisure times, daughter. There is many an odd minute lost in waiting for other folk; and, now that railroads are coming so near us, it behoves us to know something about them."

I thought of his own description of his "prodigious big appetite" for learning. And he had a good appetite of his own for the more material victual before him. But I saw, or fancied I saw, that he had some rule for himself in the matter both of food and drink.

As soon as supper was done, the household assembled for prayer. It was a long impromptu evening prayer; and it would have seemed desultory enough, had I not had a glimpse of the kind of day that preceded it, and so been able to find a clue to the thoughts that preceded the disjointed utterances; for he kept there, kneeling down in the centre of a circle, his eyes shut, his outstretched hands pressed palm to palm—sometimes with a long pause of silence, as if waiting to see if there was anything else he wished to "lay before the Lord" (to use his own expression)—before he concluded with the blessing. He prayed for the cattle and live creatures, rather to my surprise; for my attention had

begun to wander, till it was recalled by the familiar words.

And here I must not forget to name an odd incident at the conclusion of the prayer, and before we had risen from our knees (indeed, before Betty was well awake, for she made a nightly practice of having a sound nap, her weary head lying on her stalwart arms); the minister, still kneeling in our midst, but with his eyes wide open, and his arms dropped by his side, spoke to the elder man, who turned round on his knees to attend. "John, didst see that Daisy had her warm mash to-night? for we must not neglect the means, John—two quarts of gruel, a spoonful of ginger, and a gill of beer—the poor beast needs it, and I fear it slipped out of my mind to tell thee; and here was I asking a blessing and neglecting the means, which is a mockery," said he, dropping his voice.

Before we went to bed, he told me he should see little or nothing more of me during my visit, which was to end on Sunday evening, as he always gave up both Saturday and Sabbath to his work in the ministry. I remembered that the landlord at the inn had told me this, on the day when I first inquired about these new relations of mine; and I did not dislike the opportunity which I saw would be afforded me of becoming more acquainted with cousin Holman and Phillis, though I earnestly hoped that the latter would not attack me on the subject of the dead languages.

I went to bed, and dreamed that I was as tall as cousin Phillis, and had a sudden and miraculous growth of whisker, and a still more miraculous acquaintance with Latin and Greek. Alas! I wakened up still a short, beardless lad, with "*tempus fugit*" for my sole remembrance of the little Latin I had once learnt. While I was dressing, a bright thought came over me: I could question cousin Phillis, instead of her questioning me, and so manage to keep the choice of the subjects of conversation in my own power.

Early as it was, every one had breakfasted, and my basin of bread and milk was put on the oven-top to await my

coming down. Every one was gone about their work. The first to come into the house-place was Phillis, with a basket of eggs. Faithful to my resolution, I asked—

"What are those?"

She looked at me for a moment, and then said gravely—

"Potatoes."

"No! they are not," said I. "They are eggs. What do you mean by saying they are potatoes?"

"What did you mean by asking me what they were, when they were plain to be seen?" retorted she.

We were both getting a little angry with each other.

"I don't know. I wanted to begin to talk to you; and I was afraid you would talk to me about books as you did yesterday. I have not read much; and you and the minister have read so much."

"I have not," said she. "But you are our guest; and mother says I must make it pleasant to you. We won't talk of books. What must we talk about?"

"I don't know. How old are you?"

"Seventeen last May. How old are you?"

"I am nineteen. Older than you by nearly two years," said I, drawing myself up to my full height.

"I should not have thought you were above sixteen," she replied, as quietly as if she were not saying the most provoking thing she possibly could. Then came a pause.

"What are you going to do now?" asked I.

"I should be dusting the bed-chambers; but mother said I had better stay and make it pleasant to you," said she, a little plaintively, as if dusting rooms was far the easier task.

"Will you take me to see the live-stock? I like animals, though I don't know much about them."

"Oh, do you? I am so glad. I was afraid you would not like animals, as you did not like books."

I wondered why she said this. I think it was because she had begun to fancy all our tastes must be dissimilar. We went together all through the farmyard; we fed the

poultry, she kneeling down with her pinafore full of corn and meal, and tempting the little timid downy chickens upon it, much to the anxiety of the fussy ruffled hen, their mother. She called to the pigeons, who fluttered down at the sound of her voice. She and I examined the great sleek cart-horses; sympathised in our dislike of pigs; fed the calves; coaxed the sick cow, Daisy; and admired the others out at pasture; and came back tired and hungry and dirty at dinner-time, having quite forgotten that there were such things as dead languages, and consequently capital friends.

PART II

Cousin Holman gave me the weekly county-newspaper to read aloud to her, while she mended stockings out of a high piled-up basket, Phillis helping her mother. I read and read, unregardful of the words I was uttering, thinking of all manner of other things; of the bright colour of Phillis's hair, as the afternoon sun fell on her bending head; of the silence of the house, which enabled me to hear the double tick of the old clock which stood half-way up the stairs; of the variety of inarticulate noises which cousin Holman made while I read, to show her sympathy, wonder, or horror at the newspaper intelligence. The tranquil monotony of that hour made me feel as if I had lived for ever, and should live for ever, droning out paragraphs in that warm sunny room, with my two quiet hearers, and the curled-up pussy-cat sleeping on the hearthrug, and the clock on the house-stairs perpetually clicking out the passage of the moments. By-and-by, Betty the servant came to the door into the kitchen, and made a sign to Phillis, who put her half-mended stocking down, and went away to the kitchen without a word. Looking at cousin Holman a minute or two afterwards, I saw that she had dropped her chin upon her breast, and had

fallen fast asleep. I put the newspaper down, and was nearly following her example, when a waft of air from some unseen source slightly opened the door of communication with the kitchen, that Phillis must have left unfastened; and I saw part of her figure as she sate by the dresser, peeling apples with quick dexterity of finger, but with repeated turnings of her head towards some book lying on the dresser by her. I softly rose, and as softly went into the kitchen, and looked over her shoulder; before she was aware of my neighbourhood, I had seen that the book was in a language unknown to me, and the running title was "L'Inferno." Just as I was making out the relationship of this word to "infernal," she started and turned round, and, as if continuing her thought as she spoke, she sighed out—

"Oh! it is so difficult! Can you help me?" putting her finger below a line.

"Me! I! Not I! I don't even know what language it is in!"

"Don't you see it is Dante?" she replied, almost petulantly; she did so want help.

"Italian, then?" said I dubiously; for I was not quite sure.

"Yes. And I do so want to make it out. Father can help me a little, for he knows Latin; but then he has so little time."

"You have not much, I should think, if you have often to try and do two things at once, as you are doing now."

"Oh! that's nothing! Father bought a heap of old books cheap. And I knew something about Dante before; and I have always liked Virgil so much. Paring apples is nothing, if I could only make out this old Italian. I wish you knew it."

"I wish I did," said I, moved by her impetuosity of tone. "If, now, only Mr. Holdsworth were here! he can speak Italian like anything, I believe."

"Who is Mr. Holdsworth?" said Phillis, looking up.

"Oh, he's our head-engineer. He's a regular first-rate

fellow! He can do anything;" my hero-worship and my pride in my chief all coming into play. Besides, if I was not clever and book-learned myself, it was something to belong to some one who was.

"How is it that he speaks Italian?" asked Phillis.

"He had to make a railway through Piedmont, which is in Italy, I believe; and he had to talk to all the workmen in Italian; and I have heard him say that, for nearly two years, he had only Italian books to read in the queer outlandish places he was in."

"Oh, dear!" said Phillis; "I wish"—and then she stopped. I was not quite sure whether to say the next thing that came into my mind; but I said it.

"Could I ask him anything about your book, or your difficulties?"

She was silent for a minute or so, and then she made reply—

"No! I think not. Thank you very much, though. I can generally puzzle a thing out in time. And then, perhaps, I remember it better than if some one had helped me. I'll put it away now, and you must move off, for I've got to make the paste for the pies; we always have a cold dinner on Sabbaths."

"But I may stay and help you, mayn't I?"

"Oh, yes; not that you can help at all, but I like to have you with me."

I was both flattered and annoyed at this straightforward avowal. I was pleased that she liked me; but I was young coxcomb enough to have wished to play the lover, and I was quite wise enough to perceive that, if she had any idea of the kind in her head, she would never have spoken out so frankly. I comforted myself immediately, however, by finding out the grapes were sour. A great, tall girl in a pinafore, half-a-head taller than I was, reading books that I had never heard of, and talking about them too, as of far more interest than any mere personal subjects—that was the last day on which I ever thought of my dear cousin Phillis as the possible

mistress of my heart and life. But we were all the greater friends for this idea being utterly put away and buried out of sight.

Late in the evening the minister came home from Hornby. He had been calling on the different members of his flock; and unsatisfactory work it had proved to him, it seemed, from the fragments that dropped out of his thoughts into his talk.

"I don't see the men; they are all at their business, their shops, or their warehouses; they ought to be there. I have no fault to find with them; only, if a pastor's teaching or words of admonition are good for anything, they are needed by the men as much as by the women."

"Cannot you go and see them in their places of business, and remind them of their Christian privileges and duties, minister?" asked cousin Holman, who evidently thought that her husband's words could never be out of place.

"No!" said he, shaking his head. "I judge them by myself. If there are clouds in the sky, and I am getting in the hay just ready for loading, and rain sure to come in the night, I should look ill upon Brother Robinson if he came into the field to speak about serious things."

"But, at any rate, father, you do good to the women, and perhaps they repeat what you have said to them to their husbands and children?"

"It is to be hoped they do, for I cannot reach the men directly; but the women are apt to tarry before coming to me, to put on ribbons and gauds; as if they could hear the message I bear to them best in their smart clothes. Mrs. Dobson to-day—Phillis, I am thankful thou dost not care for the vanities of dress!"

Phillis reddened a little as she said, in a low humble voice—

"But I do, father, I'm afraid. I often wish I could wear pretty-coloured ribbons round my throat, like the squire's daughters."

"It's but natural, minister!" said his wife; "I'm not

above liking a silk gown better than a cotton one myself!"

"The love of dress is a temptation and a snare," said he, gravely. "The true adornment is a meek and quiet spirit. And, wife," said he, as a sudden thought crossed his mind, "in that matter I, too, have sinned. I wanted to ask you, could we not sleep in the grey room, instead of our own?"

"Sleep in the grey room?—change our room at this time o' day!" cousin Holman asked, in dismay.

"Yes," said he. "It would save me from a daily temptation to anger. Look at my chin!" he continued; "I cut it this morning—I cut it on Wednesday, when I was shaving; I do not know how many times I have cut it of late, and all from impatience at seeing Timothy Cooper at his work in the yard."

"He's a downright lazy tyke!" said cousin Holman. "He's not worth his wage. There's but little he can do; and what he can do, he does badly."

"True," said the minister. "But he is but, so to speak, a half-wit; and yet he has got a wife and children."

"More shame for him!"

"But that is past change. And, if I turn him off, no one else would take him on. Yet I cannot help watching him of a morning as he goes sauntering about his work in the yard; and I watch, and I watch, till the old Adam rises strong within me at his lazy ways; and some day, I am afraid, I shall go down and send him about his business—let alone the way in which he makes me cut myself while I am shaving—and then his wife and children will starve. I wish we could move to the grey room."

I do not remember much more of my first visit to the Hope Farm. We went to chapel in Heathbridge, slowly and decorously walking along the lanes, ruddy and tawny with the colouring of the coming autumn. The minister walked a little before us, his hands behind his back, his head bent down, thinking about the discourse to be delivered to his people, cousin Holman said; and we spoke low and quietly,

in order not to interrupt his thoughts. But I could not help noticing the respectful greetings which he received from both rich and poor as we went along: greetings which he acknowledged with a kindly wave of his hand, but with no words of reply. As we drew near the town, I could see some of the young fellows we met casting admiring looks on Phillis; and that made me look too. She had on a white gown, and a short black silk cloak, according to the fashion of the day. A straw bonnet, with brown ribbon strings; that was all. But what her dress wanted in colour, her sweet bonny face had. The walk made her cheeks bloom like the rose; the very whites of her eyes had a blue tinge in them, and her dark eyelashes brought out the depth of the blue eyes themselves. Her yellow hair was put away as straight as its natural curliness would allow. If she did not perceive the admiration she excited, I am sure cousin Holman did; for she looked as fierce and as proud as ever her quiet face could look, guarding her treasure, and yet glad to perceive that others could see that it was a treasure. This afternoon I had to return to Eltham, to be ready for the next day's work. I found out afterwards that the minister and his family were all "exercised in spirit," as to whether they did well in asking me to repeat my visits at the Hope Farm, seeing that of necessity I must return to Eltham on the Sabbath-day. However, they did go on asking me, and I went on visiting them, whenever my other engagements permitted me; Mr. Holdsworth being in this case, as in all, a kind and indulgent friend. Nor did my new acquaintances oust him from my strong regard and admiration. I had room in my heart for all, I am happy to say; and, as far as I can remember, I kept praising each to the other in a manner which, if I had been an older man, living more amongst people of the world, I should have thought unwise, as well as a little ridiculous. It was unwise, certainly, as it was almost sure to cause disappointment, if ever they did become acquainted; and perhaps it was ridiculous, though I do not think we any of us thought it so at the time. The minister used to listen to

my accounts of Mr. Holdsworth's many accomplishments and various adventures in travel with the truest interest, and most kindly good faith; and Mr. Holdsworth, in return, liked to hear about my visits to the farm, and description of my cousins' life there—liked it, I mean, as much as he liked anything that was merely narrative, without leading to action.

So I went to the farm certainly, on an average, once a month during that autumn; the course of life there was so peaceful and quiet, that I can only remember one small event, and that was one that I think I took more notice of than any one else: Phillis left off wearing the pinafores that had always been so obnoxious to me: I do not know why they were banished, but on one of my visits I found them replaced by pretty linen aprons in the morning, and a black silk one in the afternoon. And the blue cotton gown became a brown stuff one as winter drew on; this sounds like some book I once read, in which a migration from the blue bed to the brown was spoken of as a great family event.

Towards Christmas, my dear father came to see me, and to consult Mr. Holdsworth about the improvement which has since been known as "Manning's driving-wheel." Mr. Holdsworth, as I think I have before said, had a very great regard for my father, who had been employed in the same great machine-shop in which Mr. Holdsworth had served his apprenticeship; and he and my father had many mutual jokes about one of these gentlemen-apprentices who used to set about his smith's work in white wash-leather gloves, for fear of spoiling his hands. Mr. Holdsworth often spoke to me about my father as having the same kind of genius for mechanical invention as that of George Stephenson; and my father had come over now to consult him about several improvements, as well as an offer of partnership. It was a great pleasure to me to see the mutual regard of these two men: Mr. Holdsworth, young, handsome, keen, well-dressed, an object of admiration to all the youth of Eltham; my father, in his decent but unfashionable Sunday clothes, his

plain, sensible face full of hard lines, the marks of toil and thought,—his hands blackened, beyond the power of soap and water, by years of labour in the foundry; speaking a strong Northern dialect, while Mr. Holdsworth had a long, soft drawl in his voice, as many of the Southerners have, and was reckoned in Eltham to give himself airs.

Although most of my father's leisure-time was occupied with conversations about the business I have mentioned, he felt that he ought not to leave Eltham without going to pay his respects to the relations who had been so kind to his son. So he and I ran up on an engine along the incomplete line as far as Heathbridge, and went, by invitation, to spend a day at the farm.

It was odd and yet pleasant to me to perceive how these two men, each having led up to this point such totally dissimilar lives, seemed to come together by instinct, after one quiet straight look into each other's faces. My father was a thin, wiry man of five foot seven; the minister was a broad-shouldered, fresh-coloured man of six foot one; they were neither of them great talkers in general—perhaps the minister the most so—but they spoke much to each other. My father went into the fields with the minister; I think I see him now, with his hands behind his back, listening intently to all explanations of tillage, and the different processes of farming; occasionally taking up an implement, as if unconsciously, and examining it with a critical eye, and now and then asking a question, which I could see was considered as pertinent by his companion. Then we returned to look at the cattle, housed and bedded in expectation of the snowstorm, hanging black on the western horizon, and my father learned the points of a cow with as much attention as if he meant to turn farmer. He had his little book that he used for mechanical memoranda and measurements in his pocket, and he took it out to write down "straight back," "small muzzle," "deep barrel," and I know not what else, under the head "cow." He was very critical on a turnip-cutting machine, the clumsiness of which first incited him to

talk; and, when we went into the house, he sat thinking and quiet for a bit, while Phillis and her mother made the last preparations for tea, with a little unheeded apology from cousin Holman, because we were not sitting in the best parlour, which she thought might be chilly on so cold a night. I wanted nothing better than the blazing, crackling fire that sent a glow over all the house-place, and warmed the snowy flags under our feet, till they seemed to have more heat than the crimson rug, right in front of the fire. After tea, as Phillis and I were talking together very happily, I heard an irrepressible exclamation from cousin Holman—

"Whatever is the man about!"

And, on looking round, I saw my father taking a straight burning stick out of the fire; and, after waiting for a minute, and examining the charred end, to see if it was fitted for his purpose, he went to the hard-wood dresser, scoured to the last pitch of whiteness and cleanliness, and began drawing with the stick; the best substitute for chalk or charcoal within his reach, for his pocket-book pencil was not strong or bold enough for his purpose. When he had done, he began to explain his new model of a turnip-cutting machine to the minister, who had been watching him in silence all the time. Cousin Holman had, in the meantime, taken a duster out of a drawer, and, under pretence of being as much interested as her husband in the drawing, was secretly trying on an outside mark how easily it would come off, and whether it would leave her dresser as white as before. Then Phillis was sent for the book of dynamics, about which I had been consulted during my first visit; and my father had to explain many difficulties, which he did in language as clear as his mind, making drawings with his stick wherever they were needed as illustrations; the minister sitting with his massive head resting on his hands, his elbows on the table, almost unconscious of Phillis, leaning over and listening greedily, with her hand on his shoulder, sucking in information, like her father's own daughter. I was rather sorry for cousin Holman; I had been so once or twice before; for do what

she would, she was completely unable even to understand the pleasure her husband and daughter took in intellectual pursuits, much less to care in the least herself for the pursuits themselves, and was thus unavoidably thrown out of some of their interests. I had once or twice thought she was a little jealous of her own child, as a fitter companion for her husband than she was herself; and I fancied the minister himself was aware of this feeling, for I had noticed an occasional sudden change of subject, and a tenderness of appeal in his voice as he spoke to her, which always made her look contented and peaceful again. I do not think that Phillis ever perceived these little shadows; in the first place, she had such complete reverence for her parents that she listened to them both as if they had been St. Peter and St. Paul; and, besides, she was always too much engrossed with any matter in hand to think about other people's manners and looks.

This night I could see, though she did not, how much she was winning on my father. She asked a few questions which showed that she had followed his explanations up to that point; possibly, too, her unusual beauty might have something to do with his favourable impression of her; but he made no scruple of expressing his admiration of her to her father and mother in her absence from the room; and from that evening I date a project of his which came out to me, a day or two afterwards, as we sate in my little three-cornered room in Eltham.

"Paul," he began, "I never thought to be a rich man; but I think it's coming upon me. Some folk are making a deal of my new machine" (calling it by its technical name); "and Ellison, of the Borough Green Works, has gone so far as to ask me to be his partner."

"Mr. Ellison, the justice—who lives in King Street? why, he drives his carriage!" said I, doubting, yet exultant.

"Ay, lad, John Ellison. But that's no sign that I shall drive my carriage. Though I should like to save thy mother walking, for she's not so young as she was. But that's a long way off, anyhow. I reckon I should start with a third

profit. It might be seven hundred, or it might be more. I should like to have the power to work out some fancies o' mine. I care for that much more than for th' brass. And Ellison has no lads; and by nature the business would come to thee in course o' time. Ellison's lassies are but bits o' things, and are not like to come by husbands just yet; and, when they do, maybe they'll not be in the mechanical line. It will be an opening for thee, lad, if thou art steady. Thou'rt not great shakes, I know, in th' inventing line; but many a one gets on better without having fancies for something he does not see and never has seen. I'm right down glad to see that mother's cousins are such uncommon folk for sense and goodness. I have taken the minister to my heart like a brother, and she is a womanly, quiet sort of a body. And I'll tell you frank, Paul, it will be a happy day for me, if ever you can come and tell me that Phillis Holman is like to be my daughter. I think, if that lass had not a penny, she would be the making of a man; and she'll have yon house and lands, and you may be her match yet in fortune, if all goes well."

I was growing as red as fire; I did not know what to say, and yet I wanted to say something; but the idea of having a wife of my own at some future day, though it had often floated about in my own head, sounded so strange, when it was thus first spoken about by my father. He saw my confusion, and half-smiling said—

"Well, lad, what dost say to the old father's plans? Thou art but young, to be sure; but when I was thy age, I would ha' given my right hand, if I might ha' thought of the chance of wedding the lass I cared for"——

"My mother?" asked I, a little struck by the change of his tone of voice.

"No! not thy mother. Thy mother is a very good woman—none better. No! the lass I cared for at nineteen ne'er knew how I loved her, and a year or two after and she was dead, and ne'er knew. I think she would ha' been glad to ha' known it, poor Molly; but I had to leave the place

where we lived, for to try to earn my bread—and I meant to come back—but, before ever I did, she was dead and gone: I ha' never gone there since. But, if you fancy Phillis Holman, and can get her to fancy you, my lad, it shall go different with you, Paul, to what it did with your father."

I took counsel with myself very rapidly, and I came to a clear conclusion.

"Father," said I, "if I fancied Phillis ever so much, she would never fancy me. I like her as much as I could like a sister; and she likes me as if I were her brother—her younger brother."

I could see my father's countenance fall a little.

"You see she's so clever—she's more like a man than a woman—she knows Latin and Greek."

"She'd forget 'em, if she'd a houseful of children," was my father's comment on this.

"But she knows many a thing besides, and is wise as well as learned: she has been so much with her father. She would never think much of me, and I should like my wife to think a deal of her husband."

"It is not just book-learning, or the want of it, as makes a wife think much or little of her husband," replied my father, evidently unwilling to give up a project which had taken deep root in his mind. "It's a something—I don't rightly know how to call it—if he's manly, and sensible, and straightforward; and I reckon you're that, my boy."

"I don't think I should like to have a wife taller than I am, father," said I, smiling; he smiled too, but not heartily.

"Well," said he, after a pause. "It's but a few days I've been thinking of it; but I'd got as fond of my notion as if it had been a new engine as I'd been planning out. Here's our Paul, thinks I to myself, a good sensible breed o' lad, as has never vexed or troubled his mother or me; with a good business opening out before him; age nineteen; not so bad-looking, though perhaps not to call handsome; and here's his cousin, not too near a cousin, but just nice, as one may say; aged seventeen; good and true, and well brought up to work

with her hands as well as her head; a scholar—but that can't be helped, and is more her misfortune than her fault, seeing she is the only child of a scholar—and as I said afore, once she's a wife and a mother, she'll forget it all, I'll be bound—with a good fortune in land and house, when it shall please the Lord to take her parents to himself; with eyes like poor Molly's for beauty, a colour that comes and goes on a milk-white skin, and as pretty a mouth "——

"Why, Mr. Manning, what fair lady are you describing?" asked Mr. Holdsworth, who had come quickly and suddenly upon our *tête-à-tête*, and had caught my father's last words as he entered the room.

Both my father and I felt rather abashed; it was such an odd subject for us to be talking about; but my father, like a straightforward, simple man as he was, spoke out the truth.

"I've been telling Paul of Ellison's offer, and saying how good an opening it made for him "——

"I wish I'd as good," said Mr. Holdsworth. "But has the business a 'pretty mouth'?"

"You're always so full of your joking, Mr. Holdsworth," said my father. "I was going to say that if he and his cousin Phillis Holman liked to make it up between them, I would put no spoke in the wheel."

"Phillis Holman!" said Mr. Holdsworth. "Is she the daughter of the minister-farmer out at Heathbridge? Have I been helping on the course of true love, by letting you go there so often? I knew nothing of it."

"There is nothing to know," said I, more annoyed than I chose to show. "There is no more true love in the case than may be between the first brother and sister you may choose to meet. I have been telling father she would never think of me; she's a great deal taller and cleverer; and I'd rather be taller and more learned than my wife when I have one."

"And it is she, then, that has the pretty mouth your father spoke about? I should think that would be an antidote to the cleverness and learning. But I ought to apologise

for breaking in upon your last night; I came upon business to your father."

And then he and my father began to talk about many things that had no interest for me just then, and I began to go over again my conversation with my father. The more I thought about it, the more I felt that I had spoken truly about my feelings towards Phillis Holman. I loved her dearly as a sister, but I could never fancy her as my wife. Still less could I think of her ever—yes, *condescending*, that is the word—condescending to marry me. I was roused from a reverie on what I should like my possible wife to be, by hearing my father's warm praise of the minister, as a most unusual character; how they had got back from the diameter of driving-wheels to the subject of the Holmans, I could never tell; but I saw that my father's weighty praises were exciting some curiosity in Mr. Holdsworth's mind; indeed, he said, almost in a voice of reproach—

"Why, Paul, you never told me what kind of a fellow this minister-cousin of yours was?"

"I don't know that I found out, sir," said I. "But if I had, I don't think you'd have listened to me, as you have done to my father."

"No! most likely not, old fellow," replied Mr. Holdsworth, laughing. And, again and afresh, I saw what a handsome pleasant clear face his was; and, though this evening I had been a bit put out with him—through his sudden coming, and his having heard my father's open-hearted confidence—my hero resumed all his empire over me by his bright merry laugh.

And, if he had not resumed his old place that night, he would have done so the next day: when, after my father's departure, Mr. Holdsworth spoke about him with such just respect for his character, such ungrudging admiration of his great mechanical genius, that I was compelled to say, almost unawares—

"Thank you, sir. I am very much obliged to you."

"Oh, you're not at all. I am only speaking the truth.

Here's a Birmingham workman, self-educated, one may say —having never associated with stimulating minds, or had what advantages travel and contact with the world may be supposed to afford—working out his own thoughts into steel and iron, making a scientific name for himself—a fortune, if it pleases him to work for money—and keeping his singleness of heart, his perfect simplicity of manner; it puts me out of patience to think of my expensive schooling, my travels hither and thither, my heaps of scientific books—and I have done nothing to speak of! But it's evidently good blood; there's that Mr. Holman, that cousin of yours, made of the same stuff."

"But he's only cousin because he married my mother's second cousin," said I.

"That knocks a pretty theory on the head, and twice over, too. I should like to make Holman's acquaintance."

"I am sure they would be so glad to see you at Hope Farm," said I eagerly. "In fact, they've asked me to bring you several times; only I thought you would find it dull."

"Not at all. I can't go yet though, even if you do get me an invitation; for the —— —— Company want me to go to the —— Valley, and look over the ground a bit for them, to see if it would do for a branch line; it's a job which may take me away for some time; but I shall be backwards and forwards, and you're quite up to doing what is needed in my absence; the only work that may be beyond you is keeping old Jevons from drinking."

He went on giving me directions about the management of the men employed on the line; and no more was said then, or for several months, about his going to Hope Farm. He went off into —— Valley, a dark overshadowed dale, where the sun seemed to set behind the hills before four o'clock on midsummer afternoon.

Perhaps it was this that brought on the attack of low fever, which he had soon after the beginning of the new year; he was very ill for many weeks, almost many months; a married sister—his only relation, I think—came down

from London to nurse him, and I went over to him when I could, to see him, and give him "masculine news", as he called it; reports of the progress of the line, which, I am glad to say, I was able to carry on in his absence, in the slow gradual way which suited the company best, while trade was in a languid state and money dear in the market. Of course, with this occupation for my scanty leisure, I did not often go over to Hope Farm. Whenever I did go, I met with a thorough welcome; and many inquiries were made as to Holdsworth's illness, and the progress of his recovery.

At length, in June I think it was, he was sufficiently recovered to come back to his lodgings at Eltham, and resume part at least of his work. His sister, Mrs. Robinson, had been obliged to leave him some weeks before, owing to some epidemic amongst her own children. As long as I had seen Mr. Holdsworth in the rooms at the little inn at Hensleydale, where I had been accustomed to look upon him as an invalid, I had not been aware of the visible shake his fever had given to his health. But, once back in the old lodgings, where I had always seen him so buoyant, eloquent, decided, and vigorous in former days, my spirits sank at the change in one whom I had always regarded with a strong feeling of admiring affection. He sank into silence and despondency after the least exertion; he seemed as if he could not make up his mind to any action, or else, as if, when it was made up, he lacked strength to carry out his purpose. Of course, it was but the natural state of slow convalescence, after so sharp an illness; but, at the time, I did not know this, and perhaps I represented his state as more serious than it was, to my kind relations at Hope Farm; who, in their grave, simple, eager way, immediately thought of the only help they could give.

"Bring him out here," said the minister. "Our air here is good, to a proverb; the June days are fine; he may loiter away his time in the hay-field, and the sweet smells will be a balm in themselves—better than physic."

"And," said cousin Holman, scarcely waiting for her

husband to finish his sentence, "tell him there is new milk and fresh eggs to be had for the asking; it's lucky Daisy has just calved, for her milk is always as good as other cows' cream; and there is the plaid-room, with the morning-sun all streaming in."

Phillis said nothing, but looked as much interested in the project as any one. I took it up myself. I wanted them to see him and him to know them. I proposed it to him, when I got home. He was too languid, after the day's fatigue, to be willing to make the little exertion of going amongst strangers; and disappointed me by almost declining to accept the invitation I brought. The next morning it was different; he apologised for his ungraciousness of the night before; and told me that he would get all things in train, so as to be ready to go out with me to Hope Farm on the following Saturday.

"For you must go with me, Manning," said he; "I used to be as impudent a fellow as need be, and rather liked going amongst strangers and making my way; but since my illness I am almost like a girl, and turn hot and cold with shyness; as they do, I fancy."

So it was fixed. We were to go out to Hope Farm on Saturday afternoon; and it was also understood that, if the air and the life suited Mr. Holdsworth, he was to remain there for a week or ten days, doing what work he could at that end of the line, while I took his place at Eltham to the best of my ability. I grew a little nervous, as the time drew near, and wondered how the brilliant Holdsworth would agree with the quiet quaint family of the minister; how they would like him and many of his half-foreign ways. I tried to prepare him, by telling him, from time to time, little things about the goings-on at Hope Farm.

"Manning," said he, "I see you don't think I am half good enough for your friends. Out with it, man!"

"No," I replied boldly. "I think you are good; but I don't know if you are quite of their kind of goodness."

"And you've found out already that there is greater chance of disagreement between two 'kinds of goodness',

each having its own idea of right, than between a given goodness and a moderate degree of naughtiness—which last often arises from an indifference to right?"

"I don't know. I think you're talking metaphysics; and I am sure that is bad for you."

"'When a man talks to you in a way that you don't understand about a thing which he does not understand, them's metaphysics.' You remember the clown's definition, don't you, Manning?"

"No, I don't," said I. "But what I do understand is, that you must go to bed, and tell me at what time we must start to-morrow; that I may go to Hepworth, and get those letters written we were talking about this morning."

"Wait till to-morrow, and let us see what the day is like," he answered, with such languid indecision as showed me he was over-fatigued. So I went my way.

The morrow was blue and sunny and beautiful; the very perfection of an early summer's day. Mr. Holdsworth was all impatience to be off into the country; morning had brought back his freshness and strength, and consequent eagerness to be going. I was afraid we were going to my cousin's farm rather too early, before they would expect us; but what could I do with such a restless vehement man as Holdsworth was that morning? We came down upon the Hope Farm, before the dew was off the grass on the shady side of the lane; the great house-dog was loose, basking in the sun, near the closed side door. I was surprised at this door being shut, for all summer long it was open from morning to night; but it was only on latch. I opened it; Rover watching me with half-suspicious, half-trustful eyes. The room was empty.

"I don't know where they can be," said I. "But come in and sit down, while I go and look for them! You must be tired."

"Not I. This sweet balmy air is like a thousand tonics. Besides, this room is hot, and smells of those pungent wood-ashes. What are we to do?"

"Go round to the kitchen. Betty will tell us where they are."

So we went round into the farm-yard, Rover accompanying us out of a grave sense of duty. Betty was washing out her milk-pans, in the cold bubbling spring water that constantly trickled in and out of a stone trough. In such weather as this, most of her kitchen-work was done out of doors.

"Eh, dear!" said she, "the minister and missus is away at Hornby! They ne'er thought of your coming so betimes! The missus had some errands to do; and she thought as she'd walk with the minister and be back by dinner-time."

"Did not they expect us to dinner?" said I.

"Well, they did, and they did not, as I may say. Missus said to me, the cold lamb would do well enough, if you did not come; and, if you did, I was to put on a chicken and some bacon to boil; and I'll go do it now, for it is hard to boil bacon enough."

"And is Phillis gone, too?" Mr. Holdsworth was making friends with Rover.

"No! She's just somewhere about. I reckon you'll find her in the kitchen-garden, getting peas."

"Let us go there," said Holdsworth, suddenly leaving off his play with the dog.

So I led the way into the kitchen-garden. It was in the first promise of a summer profuse in vegetables and fruits. Perhaps it was not so much cared for as other parts of the property; but it was more attended to than most kitchen-gardens belonging to farm-houses. There were borders of flowers along each side of the gravel-walks; and there was an old sheltering wall on the north side, covered with tolerably choice fruit-trees; there was a slope down to the fish-pond at the end, where there were great strawberry-beds; and raspberry-bushes and rose-bushes grew wherever there was a space; it seemed a chance which had been planted. Long rows of peas stretched at right angles from the main walk; and I saw Phillis stooping down among them, before she saw us. As soon as she heard our

cranching steps on the gravel, she stood up, and, shading her eyes from the sun, recognised us. She was quite still for a moment, and then came slowly towards us, blushing a little, from evident shyness. I had never seen Phillis shy before.

"This is Mr. Holdsworth, Phillis," said I, as soon as I had shaken hands with her. She glanced up at him, and then looked down, more flushed than ever at his grand formality of taking his hat off and bowing; such manners had never been seen at Hope Farm before.

"Father and mother are out. They will be so sorry; you did not write, Paul, as you said you would."

"It was my fault," said Holdsworth, understanding what she meant, as well as if she had put it more fully into words. "I have not yet given up all the privileges of an invalid; one of which is indecision. Last night, when your cousin asked me at what time we were to start, I really could not make up my mind."

Phillis seemed as if she could not make up her mind as to what to do with us. I tried to help her—

"Have you finished getting peas?" taking hold of the half-filled basket she was unconsciously holding in her hand; "or may we stay and help you?"

"If you would. But perhaps it will tire you, sir?" added she, speaking now to Holdsworth.

"Not a bit," said he. "It will carry me back twenty years in my life, when I used to gather peas in my grandfather's garden. I suppose I may eat a few, as I go along?"

"Certainly, sir. But, if you went to the strawberry-beds, you would find some strawberries ripe; and Paul can show you where they are."

"I am afraid you distrust me. I can assure you, I know the exact fulness at which peas should be gathered. I take great care not to pluck them when they are unripe. I will not be turned off, as unfit for my work."

This was a style of half-joking talk that Phillis was not accustomed to. She looked for a moment as if she would

have liked to defend herself from the playful charge of distrust made against her; but she ended by not saying a word. We all plucked our peas in busy silence for the next five minutes. Then Holdsworth lifted himself up from between the rows, and said, a little wearily—

"I am afraid I must strike work. I am not as strong as I fancied myself."

Phillis was full of penitence immediately. He did, indeed, look pale; and she blamed herself for having allowed him to help her.

"It was very thoughtless of me. I did not know—I thought, perhaps, you really liked it. I ought to have offered you something to eat, sir! Oh, Paul, we have gathered quite enough; how stupid I was to forget that Mr. Holdsworth had been ill!" And in a blushing hurry she led the way towards the house. We went in, and she moved a heavy-cushioned chair forwards, into which Holdsworth was only too glad to sink. Then, with deft and quiet speed, she brought in a little tray—wine, water, cake, home-made bread, and newly-churned butter. She stood by in some anxiety till, after bite and sup, the colour returned to Mr. Holdsworth's face, and he would fain have made us some laughing apologies for the fright he had given us. But then Phillis drew back from her innocent show of care and interest, and relapsed into the cold shyness habitual to her when she was first thrown into the company of strangers. She brought out the last week's county-paper (which Mr. Holdsworth had read five days ago), and then quietly withdrew; and then he subsided into languor, leaning back and shutting his eyes, as if he would go to sleep. I stole into the kitchen after Phillis; but she had made the round of the corner of the house outside, and I found her sitting on the horse-mount, with her basket of peas, and a basin into which she was shelling them. Rover lay at her feet, snapping now and then at the flies. I went to her, and tried to help her; but somehow the sweet, crisp young peas found their way more frequently into my mouth than into

the basket, while we talked together in a low tone, fearful of being overheard through the open casements of the house-place, in which Holdsworth was resting.

"Don't you think him handsome?" asked I.

"Perhaps—yes—I have hardly looked at him," she replied. "But is not he very like a foreigner?"

"Yes, he cuts his hair foreign fashion," said I.

"I like an Englishman to look like an Englishman."

"I don't think he thinks about it. He says he began that way when he was in Italy, because everybody wore it so, and it is natural to keep it on in England."

"Not if he began it in Italy, because everybody there wore it so. Everybody here wears it differently."

I was a little offended with Phillis's logical fault-finding with my friend; and I determined to change the subject.

"When is your mother coming home?"

"I should think she might come any time now; but she had to go and see Mrs. Morton, who was ill; and she might be kept, and not be home till dinner. Don't you think you ought to go and see how Mr. Holdsworth is going on, Paul? He may be faint again."

I went at her bidding; but there was no need for it. Mr. Holdsworth was up, standing by the window, his hands in his pockets; he had evidently been watching us. He turned away as I entered.

"So that is the girl I found your good father planning for your wife, Paul, that evening when I interrupted you! Are you of the same coy mind still? It did not look like it a minute ago."

"Phillis and I understand each other," I replied sturdily. "We are like brother and sister. She would not have me as a husband, if there was not another man in the world; and it would take a deal to make me think of her—as my father wishes" (somehow I did not like to say "as a wife"); "but we love each other dearly."

"Well, I am rather surprised at it—not at your loving each other in a brother-and-sister kind of way—but at your

finding it so impossible to fall in love with such a beautiful woman."

Woman! beautiful woman! I had thought of Phillis as a comely, but awkward, girl; and I could not banish the pinafore from my mind's eye when I tried to picture her to myself. Now I turned, as Mr. Holdsworth had done, to look at her again out of the window: she had just finished her task, and was standing up, her back to us, holding the basket and the basin in it, high in air, out of Rover's reach, who was giving vent to his delight at the probability of a change of place by glad leaps and barks, and snatches at what he imagined to be a withheld prize. At length she grew tired of their mutual play, and, with a feint of striking him, and a "Down, Rover! do hush!" she looked towards the window where we were standing, as if to reassure herself that no one had been disturbed by the noise; and seeing us, she coloured all over, and hurried away, with Rover still curving in sinuous lines about her as she walked.

"I should like to have sketched her," said Mr. Holdsworth, as he turned away. He went back to his chair, and rested in silence for a minute or two. Then he was up again.

"I would give a good deal for a book," said he. "It would keep me quiet." He began to look round; there were a few volumes at one end of the shovel-board.

"Fifth volume of Matthew Henry's Commentary," said he, reading their titles aloud. "Housewife's Complete Manual; Berridge on Prayer; L'Inferno—Dante!" in great surprise. "Why, who reads this?"

"I told you Phillis read it. Don't you remember? She knows Latin and Greek, too."

"To be sure! I remember! But somehow I never put two and two together. That quiet girl, full of household-work, is the wonderful scholar, then, that put you to rout with her questions, when you first began to come here! To be sure, 'Cousin Phillis!' What's here—a paper with the hard obsolete words written out. I wonder what sort of a

dictionary she has got. Baretti won't tell her all these words. Stay! I have got a pencil here. I'll write down the most accepted meanings, and save her a little trouble."

So he took her book and the paper back to the little round table, and employed himself in writing explanations and definitions of the words which had troubled her. I was not sure if he was not taking a liberty; it did not quite please me, and yet I did not know why. He had only just done, and replaced the paper in the book, and put the latter back in its place, when I heard the sound of wheels stopping in the lane; and, looking out, I saw cousin Holman getting out of a neighbour's gig, making her little curtsey of acknowledgment, and then coming towards the house. I went out to meet her.

"Oh, Paul!" said she, "I am so sorry I was kept; and then Thomas Dobson said, if I would wait a quarter of an hour, he would—— But where's your friend Mr. Holdsworth? I hope he is come?"

Just then he came out and, with his pleasant cordial manner, took her hand, and thanked her for asking him to come out here to get strong.

"I'm sure I am very glad to see you, sir. It was the minister's thought. I took it into my head you would be dull in our quiet house, for Paul says you've been such a great traveller; but the minister said that dulness would perhaps suit you while you were but ailing, and that I was to ask Paul to be here as much as he could. I hope you'll find yourself happy with us, I'm sure, sir. Has Phillis given you something to eat and drink, I wonder? there's a deal in eating a little often, if one has to get strong after an illness." And then she began to question him as to the details of his indisposition, in her simple, motherly way. He seemed at once to understand her, and to enter into friendly relations with her. It was not quite the same in the evening, when the minister came home. Men have always a little natural antipathy to get over when they first meet as strangers. But, in this case, each was disposed to make an

effort to like the other; only, each was to each a specimen of an unknown class. I had to leave the Hope Farm on Sunday afternoon, as I had Mr. Holdsworth's work as well as my own to look to in Eltham; and I was not at all sure how things would go on during the week that Holdsworth was to remain on his visit; I had been once or twice in hot water already, at the near clash of opinions between the minister and my much-vaunted friend. On the Wednesday I received a short note from Holdsworth; he was going to stay on, and return with me on the following Sunday, and he wanted me to send him a certain list of books, his theodolite, and other surveying instruments, all of which could easily be conveyed down the line to Heathbridge. I went to his lodgings and picked out the books. Italian, Latin, trigonometry; a pretty considerable parcel they made, besides the implements. I began to be curious as to the general progress of affairs at Hope Farm; but I could not go over till the Saturday. At Heathbridge I found Holdsworth, come to meet me. He was looking quite a different man to what I had left him: embrowned; sparkles in his eyes, so languid before. I told him how much stronger he looked.

"Yes!" said he. "I am fidging-fain to be at work again. Last week, I dreaded the thoughts of my employment; now I am full of desire to begin. This week in the country has done wonders for me."

"You have enjoyed yourself, then?"

"Oh! it has been perfect in its way. Such a thorough country-life! and yet removed from the dulness which I always used to fancy accompanied country-life, by the extraordinary intelligence of the minister. I have fallen into calling him 'the minister,' like every one else."

"You get on with him, then?" said I. "I was a little afraid."

"I was on the verge of displeasing him once or twice, I fear, with random assertions and exaggerated expressions, such as one always uses with other people, and thinks nothing of; but I tried to check myself when I saw how

it shocked the good man; and really it is very wholesome exercise, this trying to make one's words represent one's thoughts, instead of merely looking to their effect on others."

"Then you are quite friends now?" I asked.

"Yes, thoroughly; at any rate as far as I go. I never met a man with such a desire for knowledge. In information, as far as it can be gained from books, he far exceeds me on most subjects; but then I have travelled and seen—— Were not you surprised at the list of things I sent for?"

"Yes; I thought it did not promise much rest."

"Oh, some of the books were for the minister, and some for his daughter. (I call her 'Phillis' to myself, but I use a round-about way of speaking of her to others. I don't like to seem familiar, and yet 'Miss Holman' is a term I have never heard used.)"

"I thought the Italian books were for her."

"Yes! Fancy her trying at Dante for her first book in Italian! I had a capital novel by Manzoni, '*I Promessi Sposi*,' just the thing for a beginner! and, if she must still puzzle out Dante, my dictionary is far better than hers."

"Then she found out you had written those definitions on her list of words?"

"Oh! yes"—with a smile of amusement and pleasure. He was going to tell me what had taken place, but checked himself.

"But I don't think the minister will like your having given her a novel to read?"

"Pooh! What can be more harmless? Why make a bugbear of a word! It is as pretty and innocent a tale as can be met with. You don't suppose they take Virgil for gospel?"

By this time we were at the farm. I think Phillis gave me a warmer welcome than usual, and cousin Holman was kindness itself. Yet somehow I felt as if I had lost my place, and that Holdsworth had taken it. He knew all the ways of the house; he was full of little filial attentions to cousin Holman; he treated Phillis with the affectionate

condescension of an elder brother; not a bit more; not in any way different. He questioned me about the progress of affairs in Eltham with eager interest.

"Ah!" said cousin Holman, "you'll be spending a different kind of time next week to what you have done this! I can see how busy you'll make yourself! But, if you don't take care, you'll be ill again, and have to come back to our quiet ways of going on."

"Do you suppose I shall need to be ill to wish to come back here?" he answered warmly. "I am only afraid you have treated me so kindly that I shall always be turning up on your hands."

"That's right," she replied. "Only don't go and make yourself ill by over-work. I hope you'll go on with a cup of new milk every morning, for I am sure that is the best medicine; and put a teaspoonful of rum in it, if you like; many a one speaks highly of that, only we had no rum in the house."

I brought with me an atmosphere of active life which I think he had begun to miss; and it was natural that he should seek my company, after his week of retirement. Once, I saw Phillis looking at us, as we talked together, with a kind of wistful curiosity; but, as soon as she caught my eye, she turned away, blushing deeply.

That evening I had a little talk with the minister. I strolled along the Hornby road to meet him; for Holdsworth was giving Phillis an Italian lesson, and cousin Holman had fallen asleep over her work.

Somehow, and not unwillingly on my part, our talk fell on the friend whom I had introduced to the Hope Farm.

"Yes! I like him!" said the minister, weighing his words a little as he spoke. "I like him. I hope I am justified in doing it; but he takes hold of me, as it were, and I have almost been afraid lest he carries me away, in spite of my judgment."

"He is a good fellow; indeed he is," said I. "My father thinks well of him; and I have seen a deal of him. I would

not have had him come here, if I did not know that you would approve of him."

"Yes" (once more hesitating), "I like him, and I think he is an upright man; there is a want of seriousness in his talk at times, but, at the same time, it is wonderful to listen to him! He makes Horace and Virgil living, instead of dead, by the stories he tells me of his sojourn in the very countries where they lived, and where to this day, he says—— But it is like dram-drinking. I listen to him, till I forget my duties and am carried off my feet. Last Sabbath-evening, he led us away into talk on profane subjects ill-befitting the day."

By this time we were at the house, and our conversation stopped. But, before the day was out, I saw the unconscious hold that my friend had got over all the family. And no wonder: he had seen so much and done so much, as compared to them, and he told about it all so easily and naturally, and yet as I never heard any one else do; and his ready pencil was out in an instant to draw on scraps of paper all sorts of illustrations—modes of drawing up water in Northern Italy, wine-carts, buffaloes, stone-pines, I know not what. After we had all looked at these drawings, Phillis gathered them together, and took them.

It is many years since I have seen thee, Edward Holdsworth, but thou wast a delightful fellow! Ay, and a good one too; though much sorrow was caused by thee!

PART III

Just after this, I went home for a week's holiday. Everything was prospering there; my father's new partnership gave evident satisfaction to both parties. There was no display of increased wealth in our modest household; but my mother had a few extra comforts provided for her by her husband. I made acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs.

Ellison, and first saw pretty Margaret Ellison, who is now my wife. When I returned to Eltham, I found that a step was decided upon which had been in contemplation for some time: that Holdsworth and I should remove our quarters to Hornby; our daily presence, and as much of our time as possible, being required for the completion of the line at that end.

Of course this led to greater facility of intercourse with the Hope Farm people. We could easily walk out there, after our day's work was done, and spend a balmy evening hour or two, and yet return before the summer's twilight had quite faded away. Many a time, indeed, we would fain have stayed longer—the open air, the fresh and pleasant country, made so agreeable a contrast to the close, hot town lodgings which I shared with Mr. Holdsworth; but early hours, both at eve and morn, were an imperative necessity with the minister, and he made no scruple at turning either or both of us out of the house directly after evening prayer, or "exercise," as he called it. The remembrance of many a happy day, and of several little scenes, comes back upon me as I think of that summer. They rise like pictures to my memory, and in this way I can date their succession; for I know that corn-harvest must have come after hay-making, apple-gathering after corn-harvest.

The removal to Hornby took up some time, during which we had neither of us any leisure to go out to the Hope Farm. Mr. Holdsworth had been out there once, during my absence at home. One sultry evening, when work was done, he proposed our walking out and paying the Holmans a visit. It so happened that I had omitted to write my usual weekly letter home in our press of business, and I wished to finish that before going out. Then he said that he would go, and that I could follow him, if I liked. This I did in about an hour; the weather was so oppressive, I remember, that I took off my coat as I walked, and hung it over my arm. All the doors and windows at the farm were open, when I arrived there, and every tiny leaf on the trees was still. The

silence of the place was profound; at first I thought it was entirely deserted; but, just as I drew near the door, I heard a weak, sweet voice begin to sing; it was cousin Holman, all by herself in the house-place, piping up a hymn, as she knitted away in the clouded light. She gave me a kindly welcome, and poured out all the small domestic news of the fortnight past upon me; and, in return, I told her about my own people and my visit at home.

"Where were the rest?" at length I asked.

Betty and the men were in the field helping with the last load of hay, for the minister said there would be rain before the morning. Yes, and the minister himself, and Phillis, and Mr. Holdsworth, were all there helping. She thought that she herself could have done something; but perhaps she was the least fit for hay-making of any one; and somebody must stay at home and take care of the house, there were so many tramps about; if I had not had something to do with the railroad, she would have called them navvies. I asked her if she minded being left alone, as I should like to go and help; and, having her full and glad permission to leave her alone, I went off, following her directions: through the farm-yard, past the cattle-pond, into the ash-field, beyond into the higher field, with two holly-bushes in the middle. I arrived there: there was Betty with all the farming men, and a cleared field, and a heavily-laden cart; one man at the top of the great pile, ready to catch the fragrant hay which the others threw up to him with their pitchforks; a little heap of cast-off clothes in a corner of the field (for the heat, even at seven o'clock, was insufferable), a few cans and baskets, and Rover lying by them, panting, and keeping watch. Plenty of loud, hearty, cheerful talking; but no minister, no Phillis, no Mr. Holdsworth. Betty saw me first, and, understanding who it was that I was in search of, she came towards me.

"They're out yonder—a-gait wi' them things o' Measter Holdsworth's."

So "out yonder" I went; out on to a broad upland common, full of red sand-banks, and sweeps and hollows;

bordered by dark firs, purple in the coming shadows, but near at hand all ablaze with flowering gorse, or, as we call it in the south, furze-bushes, which, seen against the belt of distant trees, appeared brilliantly golden. On this heath, a little way from the field-gate, I saw the three. I counted their heads, joined together in an eager group over Holdsworth's theodolite. He was teaching the minister the practical art of surveying and taking a level. I was wanted to assist, and was quickly set to work to hold the chain. Phillis was as intent as her father; she had hardly time to greet me, so desirous was she to hear some answer to her father's question.

So we went on, the dark clouds still gathering, for perhaps five minutes after my arrival. Then came the blinding lightning and the rumble and quick-following rattling peal of thunder, right over our heads. It came sooner than I expected, sooner than they had looked for: the rain delayed not; it came pouring down; and what were we to do for shelter? Phillis had nothing on but her indoor things—no bonnet, no shawl. Quick as the darting lightning around us, Holdsworth took off his coat and wrapped it round her neck and shoulders, and, almost without a word, hurried us all into such poor shelter as one of the over-hanging sand-banks could give. There we were, cowered down, close together, Phillis innermost, almost too tightly-packed to free her arms enough to divest herself of the coat, which she, in her turn, tried to put lightly over Holdsworth's shoulders. In doing so, she touched his shirt.

"Oh, how wet you are!" she cried, in pitying dismay; "and you've hardly got over your fever! Oh, Mr. Holdsworth, I am so sorry!" He turned his head a little, smiling at her.

"If I do catch cold, it is all my fault for having deluded you into staying out here!" But she only murmured again, "I am so sorry."

The minister spoke now. "It is a regular down-pour. Please God that the hay is saved! But there is no likelihood of its ceasing, and I had better go home at once, and send

you all some wraps; umbrellas will not be safe with yonder thunder and lightning."

Both Holdsworth and I offered to go instead of him; but he was resolved, although perhaps it would have been wiser if Holdsworth, wet as he already was, had kept himself in exercise. As he moved off, Phillis crept out, and could see on to the storm-swept heath. Part of Holdsworth's apparatus still remained exposed to all the rain. Before we could have any warning, she had rushed out of the shelter and collected the various things, and brought them back in triumph to where we crouched. Holdsworth had stood up, uncertain whether to go to her assistance or not. She came running back, her long lovely hair floating and dripping, her eyes glad and bright, and her colour freshened to a glow of health by the exercise and the rain.

"Now, Miss Holman, that's what I call wilful," said Holdsworth, as she gave them to him. "No, I won't thank you" (his looks were thanking her all the time). "My little bit of dampness annoyed you, because you thought I had got wet in your service; so you were determined to make me as uncomfortable as you were yourself. It was an unchristian piece of revenge!"

His tone of badinage (as the French call it) would have been palpable enough to any one accustomed to the world; but Phillis was not, and it distressed or rather bewildered her. "Unchristian" had to her a very serious meaning; it was not a word to be used lightly; and, though she did not exactly understand what wrong it was that she was accused of doing, she was evidently desirous to throw off the imputation. At first, her earnestness to disclaim unkind motives amused Holdsworth; while his light continuance of the joke perplexed her still more; but at last he said something gravely, and in too low a tone for me to hear, which made her all at once become silent, and called out her blushes. After a while, the minister came back, a moving mass of shawls, cloaks, and umbrellas. Phillis kept very close to her father's side on our return to the farm. She appeared to me to be

shrinking away from Holdsworth, while he had not the slightest variation in his manner from what it usually was in his graver moods; kind, protecting, and thoughtful towards her. Of course, there was a great commotion about our wet clothes; but I name the little events of that evening now, because I wondered at the time what he had said in that low voice to silence Phillis so effectually, and because, in thinking of their intercourse by the light of future events, that evening stands out with some prominence.

I have said that, after our removal to Hornby, our communications with the farm became almost of daily occurrence. Cousin Holman and I were the two who had least to do with this intimacy. After Mr. Holdsworth regained his health, he too often talked above her head in intellectual matters, and too often in his light bantering tone for her to feel quite at her ease with him. I really believe that he adopted this latter tone in speaking to her because he did not know what to talk about to a purely motherly woman, whose intellect had never been cultivated, and whose loving heart was entirely occupied with her husband, her child, her household affairs, and, perhaps, a little with the concerns of the members of her husband's congregation, because they, in a way, belonged to her husband. I had noticed before that she had fleeting shadows of jealousy even of Phillis, when her daughter and her husband appeared to have strong interests and sympathies in things which were quite beyond her comprehension. I had noticed it in my first acquaintance with them, I say, and had admired the delicate tact which made the minister, on such occasions, bring the conversation back to such subjects as those on which his wife, with her practical experience of everyday life, was an authority; while Phillis, devoted to her father, unconsciously followed his lead, totally unaware, in her filial reverence, of his motive for doing so.

To return to Holdsworth. The minister had at more than one time spoken of him to me with slight distrust, principally occasioned by the suspicion that his careless words were not always those of soberness and truth. But

it was more as a protest against the fascination which the younger man evidently exercised over the elder one—more, as it were, to strengthen himself against yielding to this fascination—that the minister spoke out to me about this failing of Holdsworth's, as it appeared to him. In return, Holdsworth was subdued by the minister's uprightness and goodness, and delighted with his clear intellect—his strong healthy craving after further knowledge. I never met two men who took more thorough pleasure and relish in each other's society. To Phillis his relation continued that of an elder brother: he directed her studies into new paths; he patiently drew out the expression of many of her thoughts, and perplexities, and unformed theories, scarcely ever now falling into the vein of banter which she was so slow to understand.

One day—harvest-time—he had been drawing on a loose piece of paper—sketching ears of corn, sketching carts drawn by bullocks and laden with grapes—all the time talking with Phillis and me, cousin Holman putting in her not pertinent remarks, when suddenly he said to Phillis—

"Keep your head still; I see a sketch! I have often tried to draw your head from memory, and failed; but I think I can do it now. If I succeed, I will give it to your mother. You would like a portrait of your daughter as Ceres, would you not, ma'am?"

"I should like a picture of her; yes, very much, thank you, Mr. Holdsworth; but if you put that straw in her hair" (he was holding some wheat ears above her passive head, looking at the effect with an artistic eye), "you'll ruffle her hair. Phillis, my dear, if you're to have your picture taken, go upstairs, and brush your hair smooth."

"Not on any account. I beg your pardon; but I want hair loosely-flowing."

He began to draw, looking intently at Phillis; I could see this stare of his discomposed her—her colour came and went, her breath quickened with the consciousness of his regard; at last, when he said, "Please look at me for a

minute or two, I want to get in the eyes," she looked up at him, quivered, and suddenly got up and left the room. He did not say a word, but went on with some other part of the drawing; his silence was unnatural, and his dark cheek blanched a little. Cousin Holman looked up from her work, and put her spectacles down.

"What's the matter? Where is she gone?"

Holdsworth never uttered a word, but went on drawing. I felt obliged to say something; it was stupid enough, but stupidity was better than silence just then.

"I'll go and call her," said I. So I went into the hall, and to the bottom of the stairs; but just as I was going to call Phillis, she came down swiftly with her bonnet on, and saying, "I'm going to father in the five-acre," passed out by the open "rector," right in front of the house-place windows, and out at the little white side-gate. She had been seen by her mother and Holdsworth as she passed; so there was no need for explanation; only, cousin Holman and I had a long discussion as to whether she could have found the room too hot, or what had occasioned her sudden departure. Holdsworth was very quiet during all the rest of that day; nor did he resume the portrait-taking by his own desire, only, at my cousin Holman's request, the next time that he came; and then he said he should not require any more formal sittings for only such a slight sketch as he felt himself capable of making. Phillis was just the same as ever, the next time I saw her after her abrupt passing me in the hall. She never gave any explanation of her rush out of the room.

So all things went on, at least as far as my observation reached at the time, or memory can recall now, till the great apple-gathering of the year. The nights were frosty, the mornings and evenings were misty, but at mid-day all was sunny and bright; and it was one mid-day that, both of us being on the line near Heathbridge, and knowing that they were gathering apples at the farm, we resolved to spend the men's dinner-hour in going over there. We found the great clothes-baskets full of apples, scenting the house and stopping

up the way, and an universal air of merry contentment with this the final produce of the year. The yellow leaves hung on the trees, ready to flutter down at the slightest puff of air; the great bushes of Michaelmas daisies in the kitchen-garden were making their last show of flowers. We must needs taste the fruit off the different trees, and pass our judgment as to their flavour; and we went away with our pockets stuffed with those that we liked best. As we had passed to the orchard, Holdsworth had admired and spoken about some flower which he saw; it so happened he had never seen this old-fashioned kind since the days of his boyhood. I do not know whether he had thought anything more about this chance speech of his, but I know I had not—when Phillis, who had been missing just at the last moment of our hurried visit, re-appeared with a little nosegay of this same flower, which she was tying up with a blade of grass. She offered it to Holdsworth as he stood with her father on the point of departure. I saw their faces. I saw for the first time an unmistakable look of love in his black eyes; it was more than gratitude for the little attention; it was tender and beseeching—passionate. She shrank from it in confusion, her glance fell on me; and, partly to hide her emotion, partly out of real kindness at what might appear ungracious neglect of an older friend, she flew off to gather me a few late-blooming China roses. But it was the first time she had ever done anything of the kind for me.

We had to walk fast to be back on the line before the men's return; so we spoke but little to each other, and of course the afternoon was too much occupied for us to have any talk. In the evening we went back to our joint lodgings in Hornby. There, on the table, lay a letter for Holdsworth, which had been forwarded to him from Eltham. As our tea was ready, and I had had nothing to eat since morning, I fell to directly, without paying much attention to my companion as he opened and read his letter. He was very silent for a few minutes; at length he said—

"Old fellow! I'm going to leave you."

"Leave me!" said I. "How? When?"

"This letter ought to have come to hand sooner. It is from Greathed the engineer" (Greathed was well known in those days; he is dead now, and his name half-forgotten); "he wants to see me about some business; in fact, I may as well tell you, Paul, this letter contains a very advantageous proposal for me to go out to Canada, and superintend the making of a line there."

I was in utter dismay.

"But what will our Company say to that?"

"Oh, Greathed has the superintendence of this line, you know, and he is going to be engineer-in-chief to this Canadian line: many of the shareholders in this Company are going in for the other; so I fancy they will make no difficulty in following Greathed's lead. He says he has a young man ready to put in my place."

"I hate him," said I.

"Thank you," said Holdsworth, laughing.

"But you must not," he resumed; "for this is a very good thing for me; and, of course, if no one can be found to take my inferior work, I can't be spared to take the superior. I only wish I had received this letter a day sooner. Every hour is of consequence, for Greathed says they are threatening a rival line. Do you know, Paul, I almost fancy I must go up to-night? I can take an engine back to Eltham, and catch the night train. I should not like Greathed to think me lukewarm."

"But you'll come back?" I asked, distressed at the thought of this sudden parting.

"Oh, yes! At least I hope so. They may want me to go out by the next steamer; that will be on Saturday." He began to eat and drink standing, but I think he was quite unconscious of the nature of either his food or his drink.

"I will go to-night. Activity and readiness go a long way in our profession. Remember that, my boy! I hope I shall come back; but, if I don't, be sure and recollect all the words of wisdom that have fallen from my lips. Now,

where's the portmanteau? If I can gain half-an-hour for a gathering up of my things in Eltham, so much the better. I'm clear of debt, anyhow; and what I owe for my lodgings you can pay for me out of my quarter's salary, due November 4th."

"Then you don't think you will come back?" I said despondingly.

"I will come back some time, never fear," said he kindly. "I may be back in a couple of days, having been found incompetent for the Canadian work; or I may not be wanted to go out so soon as I now anticipate. Anyhow, you don't suppose I am going to forget you, Paul—this work out there ought not to take me above two years, and, perhaps, after that, we may be employed together again."

Perhaps! I had very little hope. The same kind of happy days never return. However, I did all I could in helping him: clothes, papers, books, instruments; how we pushed and struggled—how I stuffed! All was done in a much shorter time than we had calculated upon, when I had run down to the sheds to order the engine. I was going to drive him to Eltham. We sat ready for a summons. Holdsworth took up the little nosegay he had brought away from the Hope Farm, and had laid on the mantelpiece on first coming into the room. He smelt at it, and caressed it with his lips.

"What grieves me is that I did not know—that I have not said good-bye to—to them."

He spoke in a grave tone, the shadow of the coming separation falling upon him at last.

"I will tell them," said I. "I am sure they will be very sorry." Then we were silent.

"I never liked any family so much."

"I knew you would like them."

"How one's thoughts change—this morning I was full of a hope, Paul." He paused, and then he said—

"You put that sketch in carefully?"

"That outline of a head?" asked I. But I knew he

meant an abortive sketch of Phillis, which had not been successful enough for him to complete it with shading or colouring.

"Yes. What a sweet innocent face it is! and yet so—Oh, dear!"

He sighed and got up, his hands in his pockets, to walk up and down the room in evident disturbance of mind. He suddenly stopped opposite to me.

"You'll tell them how it all was. Be sure and tell the good minister that I was so sorry not to wish him good-bye, and to thank him and his wife for all their kindness. As for Phillis—please God, in two years I'll be back and tell her myself all in my heart."

"You love Phillis, then?" said I.

"Love her!—Yes, that I do. Who could help it, seeing her as I have done? Her character as unusual and rare as her beauty! God bless her! God keep her in her high tranquillity, her pure innocence!—Two years! It is a long time. But she lives in such seclusion, almost like the sleeping beauty, Paul,—" (he was smiling now, though a minute before I had thought him on the verge of tears) "—but I shall come back like a prince from Canada, and waken her to my love. I can't help hoping that it won't be difficult; eh, Paul?"

This touch of coxcombry displeased me a little, and I made no answer. He went on, half apologetically—

"You see, the salary they offer me is large; and, besides that, this experience will give me a name which will entitle me to expect a still larger in any future undertaking."

"That won't influence Phillis."

"No! but it will make me more eligible in the eyes of her father and mother."

I made no answer.

"You give me your best wishes, Paul," said he, almost pleading. "You would like me for a cousin?"

I heard the scream and whistle of the engine, ready down at the sheds.

"Ay, that I should," I replied, suddenly softened towards my friend, now that he was going away. "I wish you were to be married to-morrow, and I were to be best man."

"Thank you, lad. Now for this cursed portmanteau (how the minister would be shocked!)—but it is heavy!" and off we sped into the darkness.

He only just caught the night train at Eltham; and I slept, desolately enough, at my old lodgings at Miss Dawson's, for that night. Of course, the next few days I was busier than ever, doing both his work and my own. Then came a letter from him, very short and affectionate. He was going out in the Saturday steamer, as he had more than half expected; and by the following Monday the man who was to succeed him would be down at Eltham. There was a P.S., with only these words:—

"My nosegay goes with me to Canada; but I do not need it to remind me of Hope Farm."

Saturday came; but it was very late before I could go out to the farm. It was a frosty night; the stars shone clear above me, and the road was crisping beneath my feet. They must have heard my footsteps, before I got up to the house. They were sitting at their usual employments in the house-place, when I went in. Phillis's eyes went beyond me in their look of welcome, and then fell in quiet disappointment on her work.

"And where's Mr. Holdsworth?" asked cousin Holman, in a minute or two. "I hope his cold is not worse—I did not like his short cough."

I laughed awkwardly; for I felt that I was the bearer of unpleasant news.

"His cold had need be better—for he's gone—gone away to Canada!"

I purposely looked away from Phillis, as I thus abruptly told my news.

"To Canada!" said the minister.

"Gone away!" said his wife.

But no word from Phillis.

"Yes!" said I. "He found a letter at Hornby, when we got home the other night—when we got home from here; he ought to have got it sooner; he was ordered to go up to London directly, and to see some people about a new line in Canada; and he's gone to lay it down; he has sailed to-day. He was sadly grieved not to have time to come out and wish you all good-bye; but he started for London within two hours after he got that letter. He bade me thank you most gratefully for all your kindnesses; he was very sorry not to come here once again."

Phillis got up and left the room with noiseless steps.

"I am very sorry," said the minister.

"I am sure so am I!" said cousin Holman. "I was real fond of that lad, ever since I nursed him last June after that bad fever."

The minister went on asking me questions respecting Holdsworth's future plans, and brought out a large old-fashioned atlas, that he might find out the exact places between which the new railroad was to run. Then supper was ready; it was always on the table as soon as the clock on the stairs struck eight, and down came Phillis—her face white and set, her dry eyes looking defiance at me; for I am afraid I hurt her maidenly pride by my glance of sympathetic interest as she entered the room. Never a word did she say—never a question did she ask about the absent friend; yet she forced herself to talk.

And so it was all the next day. She was as pale as could be, like one who has received some shock; but she would not let me talk to her, and she tried hard to behave as usual. Two or three times I repeated, in public, the various affectionate messages to the family with which I was charged by Holdsworth; but she took no more notice of them than if my words had been empty air. And in this mood I left her on the Sabbath evening.

My new master was not half so indulgent as my old one. He kept up strict discipline as to hours; so that it was some

time before I could again go out, even to pay a call at the Hope Farm.

It was a cold, misty evening in November. The air, even indoors, seemed full of haze; yet there was a great log burning on the hearth, which ought to have made the room cheerful. Cousin Holman and Phillis were sitting at the little round table before the fire, working away in silence. The minister had his books out on the dresser, seemingly deep in study, by the light of his solitary candle; perhaps the fear of disturbing him made the unusual stillness of the room. But a welcome was ready for me from all; not noisy, not demonstrative—that it never was; my damp wrappers were taken off, the next meal was hastened, and a chair placed for me on one side the fire, so that I pretty much commanded a view of the room. My eye caught on Phillis, looking so pale and weary, and with a sort of aching tone (if I may call it so) in her voice. She was doing all the accustomed things—fulfilling small household duties, but somehow differently—I can't tell you how, for she was just as deft and quick in her movements, only the light spring was gone out of them. Cousin Holman began to question me; even the minister put aside his books, and came and stood on the opposite side of the fireplace, to hear what waft of intelligence I brought. I had first to tell them why I had not been to see them for so long—more than five weeks. The answer was simple enough: business and the necessity of attending strictly to the orders of a new superintendent, who had not yet learned trust, much less indulgence. The minister nodded his approval of my conduct, and said—

"Right, Paul! 'Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh.' I have had my fears lest you had too much license under Edward Holdsworth."

"Ah," said cousin Holman, "poor Mr. Holdsworth! he'll be on the salt seas by this time!"

"No, indeed," said I; "he's landed. I have had a letter from him from Halifax."

Immediately a shower of questions fell thick upon me

"When?" "How?" "What was he doing?" "How did he like it?" "What sort of a voyage?" &c.

"Many is the time we thought of him when the wind was blowing so hard; the old quince-tree is blown down, Paul, that on the right hand of the great pear-tree; it was blown down last Monday week, and it was that night that I asked the minister to pray in an especial manner for all them that went down in ships upon the great deep; and he said then, that Mr. Holdsworth might be already landed; but I said, even if the prayer did not fit him, it was sure to be fitting somebody out at sea, who would need the Lord's care. Both Phillis and I thought he would be a month on the seas."

Phillis began to speak; but her voice did not come rightly at first. It was a little higher pitched than usual, when she said—

"We thought he would be a month, if he went in a sailing-vessel, or perhaps longer. I suppose he went in a steamer?"

"Old Obadiah Grimshaw was more than six weeks in getting to America," observed cousin Holman.

"I presume he cannot as yet tell how he likes his new work?" asked the minister.

"No! he is but just landed; it is but one page long. I'll read it to you, shall I?—

"'Dear Paul,—We are safe on shore, after a rough passage. Thought you would like to hear this; but homeward-bound steamer is making signals for letters. Will write again soon. It seems a year since I left Hornby. Longer, since I was at the farm. I have got my nosegay safe. Remember me to the Holmans.—Yours,

'E. H.'"

"That's not much, certainly," said the minister. "But it's a comfort to know he's on land these blowy nights."

Phillis said nothing. She kept her head bent down over

her work; but I don't think she put a stitch in, while I was reading the letter. I wondered if she understood what nosegay was meant; but I could not tell. When next she lifted up her face, there were two spots of brilliant colour on the cheeks that had been so pale before. After I had spent an hour or two there, I was bound to return back to Hornby. I told them, I did not know when I could come again, as we—by which I mean the company—had undertaken the Hensleydale line; that branch for which poor Holdsworth was surveying, when he caught his fever.

"But you'll have a holiday at Christmas," said my cousin. "Surely, they'll not be such heathens as to work you then?"

"Perhaps the lad will be going home," said the minister, as if to mitigate his wife's urgency; but, for all that, I believe he wanted me to come. Phillis fixed her eyes on me with a wistful expression, hard to resist. But, indeed, I had no thought of resisting. Under my new master I had no hope of a holiday long enough to enable me to go to Birmingham and see my parents with any comfort; and nothing could be pleasanter to me than to find myself at home at my cousin's for a day or two, then. So it was fixed that we were to meet in Hornby Chapel on Christmas-Day, and that I was to accompany them home after service, and, if possible, to stay over the next day.

I was not able to get to chapel till late on the appointed day; and so I took a seat near the door in considerable shame, although it really was not my fault. When the service was ended, I went and stood in the porch, to await the coming-out of my cousins. Some worthy people belonging to the congregation clustered into a group, just where I stood, and exchanged the good wishes of the season. It had just begun to snow; and this occasioned a little delay, and they fell into further conversation. I was not attending to what was not meant for me to hear, till I caught the name of Phillis Holman. And then I listened; where was the harm?

"I never saw any one so changed!"

"I asked Mrs. Holman," quoth another, "'Is Phillis well?' and she just said she had been having a cold which had pulled her down; she did not seem to think anything of it."

"They had best take care of her," said one of the oldest of the good ladies; "Phillis comes of a family as is not long-lived. Her mother's sister, Lydia Green, her own aunt as was, died of a decline just when she was about this lass's age."

This ill-omened talk was broken in upon by the coming-out of the minister, his wife and daughter, and the consequent interchange of Christmas compliments. I had had a shock, and felt heavy-hearted and anxious, and hardly up to making the appropriate replies to the kind greetings of my relations. I looked askance at Phillis. She had certainly grown taller and slighter, and was thinner; but there was a flush of colour on her face which deceived me for a time, and made me think she was looking as well as ever. I only saw her paleness after we had returned to the farm, and she had subsided into silence and quiet. Her grey eyes looked hollow and sad; her complexion was of a dead white. But she went about just as usual; at least, just as she had done the last time I was there, and seemed to have no ailment; and I was inclined to think that my cousin was right, when she had answered the inquiries of the good-natured gossips, and told them that Phillis was suffering from the consequences of a bad cold, nothing more.

I have said that I was to stay over the next day; a great deal of snow had come down, but not all, they said, though the ground was covered deep with the white fall. The minister was anxiously housing his cattle, and preparing all things for a long continuance of the same kind of weather. The men were chopping wood, sending wheat to the mill to be ground before the road should become impassable for a cart and horse. My cousin and Phillis had gone upstairs to the apple-room, to cover up the fruit from the frost. I

had been out the greater part of the morning, and came in about an hour before dinner. To my surprise, knowing how she had planned to be engaged, I found Phillis sitting at the dresser, resting her head on her two hands and reading, or seeming to read. She did not look up when I came in, but murmured something about her mother having sent her down out of the cold. It flashed across me that she was crying, but I put it down to some little spurt of temper; I might have known better than to suspect the gentle, serene Phillis of crossness, poor girl; I stooped down, and began to stir and build up the fire, which appeared to have been neglected. While my head was down I heard a noise which made me pause and listen—a sob, an unmistakable, irrepressible sob. I started up.

"Phillis!" I cried, going towards her, with my hand out, to take hers for sympathy with her sorrow, whatever it was. But she was too quick for me; she held her hand out of my grasp, for fear of my detaining her; as she quickly passed out of the house, she said—

"Don't, Paul! I cannot bear it!" and passed me, still sobbing, and went out into the keen, open air.

I stood still and wondered. What could have come to Phillis? The most perfect harmony prevailed in the family; and Phillis especially, good and gentle as she was, was so beloved that, if they had found out that her finger ached, it would have cast a shadow over their hearts. Had I done anything to vex her? No: she was crying before I came in. I went to look at her book—one of those unintelligible Italian books. I could make neither head nor tail of it. I saw some pencil-notes on the margin, in Holdsworth's handwriting.

Could that be it? Could that be the cause of her white looks, her weary eyes, her wasted figure, her struggling sobs? This idea came upon me like a flash of lightning on a dark night, making all things so clear we cannot forget them afterwards, when the gloomy obscurity returns. I was still standing with the book in my hand, when I heard cousin

Holman's footsteps on the stairs; and, as I did not wish to speak to her just then, I followed Phillis's example, and rushed out of the house. The snow was lying on the ground; I could track her feet by the marks they had made; I could see where Rover had joined her. I followed on, till I came to a great stack of wood in the orchard—it was built up against the back-wall of the outbuildings—and I recollected then how Phillis had told me, that first day when we strolled about together, that underneath this stack had been her hermitage, her sanctuary, when she was a child; how she used to bring her book to study there, or her work, when she was not wanted in the house; and she had now evidently gone back to this quiet retreat of her childhood, forgetful of the clue given me by her footmarks on the new-fallen snow. The stack was built up very high; but through the interstices of the sticks I could see her figure, although I did not all at once perceive how I could get to her. She was sitting on a log of wood, Rover by her. She had laid her cheek on Rover's head, and had her arm round his neck, partly for a pillow, partly from an instinctive craving for warmth on that bitter cold day. She was making a low moan, like an animal in pain, or perhaps more like the sobbing of the wind. Rover, highly flattered by her caress, and also, perhaps, touched by sympathy, was flapping his heavy tail against the ground, but not otherwise moving a hair, until he heard my approach with his quick erect ears. Then, with a short, abrupt bark of distrust, he sprang up, as if to leave his mistress. Both he and I were immovably still for a moment. I was not sure if what I longed to do was wise; and yet I could not bear to see the sweet serenity of my dear cousin's life so disturbed by a suffering which I thought I could assuage. But Rover's ears were sharper than my breathing was noiseless: he heard me, and sprang out from under Phillis's restraining hand.

"Oh, Rover, don't you leave me too!" she plained out.

"Phillis!" said I, seeing by Rover's exit that the entrance to where she sat was to be found on the other side of the

stack. "Phillis, come out! You have got a cold already; and it is not fit for you to sit there on such a day as this. You know how displeased and anxious it would make them all."

She sighed, but obeyed; stooping a little, she came out, and stood upright, opposite to me in the lonely, leafless orchard. Her face looked so meek and so sad that I felt as if I ought to beg her pardon for my necessarily authoritative words.

"Sometimes I feel the house so close," she said; "and I used to sit under the wood-stack when I was a child. It was very kind of you; but there was no need to come after me. I don't catch cold easily."

"Come with me into this cow-house, Phillis! I have got something to say to you; and I can't stand this cold, if you can."

I think she would have fain run away again; but her fit of energy was all spent. She followed me unwillingly enough —that I could see. The place to which I took her was full of the fragrant breath of the cows, and was a little warmer than the outer air. I put her inside, and stood myself in the doorway, thinking how I could best begin. At last I plunged into it.

"I must see that you don't get cold for more reasons than one; if you are ill, Holdsworth will be so anxious and miserable out there" (by which I meant Canada)—

She shot one penetrating look at me, and then turned her face away, with a slightly impatient movement. If she could have run away then, she would; but I held the means of exit in my own power. "In for a penny, in for a pound," thought I; and I went on rapidly, anyhow.

"He talked so much about you, just before he left—that night after he had been here, you know—and you had given him those flowers." She put her hands up to hide her face, but she was listening now—listening with all her ears.

"He had never spoken much about you before; but the sudden going-away unlocked his heart, and he told me how

he loved you, and how he hoped on his return that you might be his wife."

"Don't," said she, almost gasping out the word, which she had tried once or twice before to speak; but her voice had been choked. Now, she put her hand backwards; she had quite turned away from me, and felt for mine. She gave it a soft lingering pressure; and then she put her arms down on the wooden division, and laid her head on it, and cried quiet tears. I did not understand her at once, and feared lest I had mistaken the whole case, and only annoyed her. I went up to her. "Oh, Phillis! I am so sorry—I thought you would, perhaps, have cared to hear it; he did talk so feelingly, as if he did love you so much, and somehow I thought it would give you pleasure."

She lifted up her head and looked at me. Such a look! Her eyes, glittering with tears as they were, expressed an almost heavenly happiness; her tender mouth was curved with rapture—her colour vivid and blushing; but, as if she was afraid her face expressed too much—more than the thankfulness to me she was essaying to speak—she hid it again almost immediately. So it was all right then, and my conjecture was well-founded. I tried to remember something more to tell her of what he had said; but again she stopped me.

"Don't," she said. She still kept her face covered and hidden. In half a minute she added, in a very low voice, "Please, Paul, I think I would rather not hear any more—I don't mean but what I have—but what I am very much obliged—— Only—only, I think I would rather hear the rest from himself when he comes back."

And then she cried a little more, in quite a different way. I did not say any more; I waited for her. By-and-by, she turned towards me—not meeting my eyes, however; and, putting her hand in mine, just as if we were two children, she said—

"We had best go back now—I don't look as if I had been crying, do I?"

"You look as if you had a bad cold," was all the answer I made.

"Oh! but I am—I am quite well, only cold; and a good run will warm me. Come along, Paul."

So we ran, hand in hand, till, just as we were on the threshold of the house, she stopped—

"Paul, please, we won't speak about *that* again."

PART IV

When I went over on Easter-Day, I heard the chapel-gossips complimenting cousin Holman on her daughter's blooming looks, quite forgetful of their sinister prophecies three months before. And I looked at Phillis, and did not wonder at their words. I had not seen her since the day after Christmas-Day. I had left the Hope Farm only a few hours after I had told her the news which had quickened her heart into renewed life and vigour. The remembrance of our conversation in the cow-house was vividly in my mind, as I looked at her when her bright healthy appearance was remarked upon. As her eyes met mine, our mutual recollections flashed intelligence from one to the other. She turned away, her colour heightening as she did so. She seemed to be shy of me for the first few hours after our meeting, and I felt rather vexed with her for her conscious avoidance of me after my long absence. I had stepped a little out of my usual line in telling her what I did; not that I had received any charge of secrecy, or given even the slightest promise to Holdsworth that I would not repeat his words. But I had an uneasy feeling sometimes, when I thought of what I had done in the excitement of seeing Phillis so ill and in so much trouble. I meant to have told Holdsworth when I wrote next to him; but, when I had my half-finished letter before me, I sate with my pen in my hand, hesitating. I had more

scruple in revealing what I had found out or guessed at of Phillis's secret than in repeating to her his spoken words. I did not think I had any right to say out to him what I believed—namely, that she loved him dearly, and had felt his absence even to the injury of her health. Yet, to explain what I had done in telling her how he had spoken about her that last night, it would be necessary to give my reasons, so I had settled within myself to leave it alone. As she had told me she should like to hear all the details and fuller particulars and more explicit declarations first from him, so he should have the pleasure of extracting the delicious tender secret from her maidenly lips. I would not betray my guesses, my surmises, my all but certain knowledge of the state of her heart. I had received two letters from him after he had settled to his business; they were full of life and energy; but in each there had been a message to the family at the Hope Farm of more than common regard, and a slight but distinct mention of Phillis herself, showing that she stood single and alone in his memory. These letters I had sent on to the minister; for he was sure to care for them, even supposing he had been unacquainted with their writer, because they were so clever and so picturesquely-worded that they brought, as it were, a whiff of foreign atmosphere into his circumscribed life. I used to wonder what was the trade or business in which the minister would not have thriven, mentally I mean, if it had so happened that he had been called into that state. He would have made a capital engineer, that I know; and he had a fancy for the sea, like many other land-locked men to whom the great deep is a mystery and a fascination. He read law-books with relish; and once, happening to borrow "De Lolme on the British Constitution" (or some such title), he talked about jurisprudence till he was far beyond my depth. But to return to Holdsworth's letters. When the minister sent them back, he also wrote out a list of questions suggested by their perusal, which I was to pass on in my answers to Holdsworth, until I thought of suggesting a direct correspondence

between the two. That was the state of things as regarded the absent one when I went to the farm for my Easter visit, and when I found Phillis in that state of shy reserve towards me which I have named before. I thought she was ungrateful; for I was not quite sure if I had done wisely in having told her what I did. I had committed a fault, or a folly, perhaps, and all for her sake; and here was she, less friends with me than she had ever been before. This little estrangement only lasted a few hours. I think that, as soon as she felt pretty sure of there being no recurrence, either by word, look, or allusion, to the one subject that was predominant in her mind, she came back to her old sisterly ways with me. She had much to tell me of her own familiar interests: how Rover had been ill, and how anxious they had all of them been, and how, after some little discussion between her father and her, both equally grieved by the sufferings of the old dog, he had been "remembered in the household prayers," and how he had begun to get better only the very next day; and then she would have led me into a conversation on the right ends of prayer, and on special providences, and I know not what; only, I "jibbed" like their old cart-horse, and refused to stir a step in that direction. Then we talked about the different broods of chickens, and she showed me the hens that were good mothers, and told me the characters of all the poultry with the utmost good-faith; and in all good-faith I listened, for I believe there was a great deal of truth in all she said. And then we strolled on into the wood beyond the ash-meadow, and both of us sought for early primroses and the fresh green crinkled leaves. She was not afraid of being alone with me after the first day. I never saw her so lovely, or so happy. I think she hardly knew why she was so happy all the time. I can see her now, standing under the budding branches of the grey trees, over which a tinge of green seemed to be deepening day after day, her sun-bonnet fallen back on her neck, her hands full of delicate wood-flowers, quite unconscious of my gaze, but intent on sweet mockery of some

bird in neighbouring bush or tree. She had the art of warbling, and replying to the notes of different birds, and knew their song, their habits and ways, more accurately than any one else I ever knew. She had often done it at my request the spring before; but this year she really gurgled, and whistled, and warbled, just as they did, out of the very fulness and joy of her heart. She was more than ever the very apple of her father's eye; her mother gave her both her own share of love and that of the dead child who had died in infancy. I have heard cousin Holman murmur, after a long dreamy look at Phillis, and tell herself how like she was growing to Johnnie, and soothe herself with plaintive inarticulate sounds, and many gentle shakes of the head, for the aching sense of loss she would never get over in this world. The old servants about the place had the dumb loyal attachment to the child of the land, common to most agricultural labourers; not often stirred into activity or expression. My cousin Phillis was like a rose that had come to full bloom on the sunny side of a lonely house, sheltered from storms. I have read in some book of poetry—

> "A maid whom there were none to praise,
> And very few to love."

And somehow those lines always reminded me of Phillis; yet they were not true of her either. I never heard her praised; and out of her own household there were very few to love her; but, though no one spoke out their approbation, she always did right in her parents' eyes, out of her natural simple goodness and wisdom. Holdsworth's name was never mentioned between us when we were alone; but I had sent on his letters to the minister, as I have said; and more than once he began to talk about our absent friend, when he was smoking his pipe after the day's work was done. Then Phillis hung her head a little over her work, and listened in silence.

"I miss him more than I thought for; no offence to you,

Paul! I said once, his company was like dram-drinking; that was before I knew him; and perhaps I spoke in a spirit of judgment. To some men's minds everything presents itself strongly, and they speak accordingly; and so did he. And I thought, in my vanity of censorship, that his were not true and sober words; they would not have been if I had used them, but they were so to a man of his class of perceptions. I thought of the measure which I had been meting out to him, when Brother Robinson was here last Thursday, and told me that a poor little quotation I was making from the 'Georgics' savoured of vain babbling and profane heathenism. He went so far as to say that, by learning other languages than our own, we were flying in the face of the Lord's purpose when He had said, at the building of the Tower of Babel, that He would confound their languages so that they should not understand each other's speech. As Brother Robinson was to me, so was I to the quick wits, bright senses, and ready words of Holdsworth."

The first little cloud upon my peace came in the shape of a letter from Canada, in which there were two or three sentences that troubled me more than they ought to have done, to judge merely from the words employed. It was this:—"I should feel dreary enough in this out-of-the-way place, if it were not for a friendship I have formed with a French Canadian of the name of Ventadour. He and his family are a great resource to me in the long evenings. I never heard such delicious vocal music as the voices of these Ventadour boys and girls in their part-songs; and the foreign element retained in their characters and manner of living reminds me of some of the happiest days of my life. Lucille, the second daughter, is curiously like Phillis Holman." In vain I said to myself, that it was probably this likeness that made him take pleasure in the society of the Ventadour family. In vain I told my anxious fancy, that nothing could be more natural than this intimacy, and that there was no sign of its leading to any consequence that ought to disturb me. I had a presentiment, and I was disturbed; and I

could not reason it away. I dare say my presentiment was rendered more persistent and keen by the doubts which would force themselves into my mind, as to whether I had done well in repeating Holdsworth's words to Phillis. Her state of vivid happiness this summer was markedly different to the peaceful serenity of former days. If, in my thoughtfulness at noticing this, I caught her eye, she blushed and sparkled all over, guessing that I was remembering our joint secret. Her eyes fell before mine, as if she could hardly bear me to see the revelation of their bright glances. And yet I considered again, and comforted myself by the reflection that, if this change had been anything more than my silly fancy, her father or her mother would have perceived it. But they went on in tranquil unconsciousness and undisturbed peace.

A change in my own life was quickly approaching. In the July of this year my occupation on the —— railway and its branches came to an end. The lines were completed; and I was to leave ——shire, to return to Birmingham, where there was a niche already provided for me in my father's prosperous business. But, before I left the north, it was an understood thing amongst us all that I was to go and pay a visit of some weeks at the Hope Farm. My father was as much pleased at this plan as I was; and the dear family of cousins often spoke of things to be done, and sights to be shown me, during this visit. My want of wisdom in having told "that thing" (under such ambiguous words I concealed the injudicious confidence I had made to Phillis) was the only drawback to my anticipations of pleasure.

The ways of life were too simple at the Hope Farm for my coming to them to make the slightest disturbance. I knew my room, like a son of the house. I knew the regular course of their days, and that I was expected to fall into it, like one of the family. Deep summer peace brooded over the place; the warm golden air was filled with the murmur of insects near at hand, the more distant sound of voices out

in the fields, the clear far-away rumble of carts over the stone-paved lanes miles away. The heat was too great for the birds to be singing; only now and then one might hear the wood-pigeons in the trees beyond the ash-field. The cattle stood knee-deep in the pond, flicking their tails about to keep off the flies. The minister stood in the hay-field, without hat or cravat, coat or waistcoat, panting and smiling. Phillis had been leading the row of farm-servants, turning the swathes of fragrant hay with measured movement. She went to the end—to the hedge, and then, throwing down her rake, she came to me with her free sisterly welcome. "Go, Paul!" said the minister. "We need all hands to make use of the sunshine to-day. 'Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.' It will be a healthy change of work for thee, lad; and I find my best rest in change of work." So off I went, a willing labourer, following Phillis's lead; it was the primitive distinction of rank; the boy who frightened the sparrows off the fruit was the last in our rear. We did not leave off till the red sun was gone down behind the fir-trees bordering the common. Then we went home to supper—prayers—to bed; some bird singing far into the night, as I heard it through my open window, and the poultry beginning their clatter and cackle in the earliest morning. I had carried what luggage I immediately needed with me from my lodgings, and the rest was to be sent by the carrier. He brought it to the farm betimes that morning; and along with it he brought a letter or two that had arrived since I had left. I was talking to cousin Holman—about my mother's ways of making bread, I remember; cousin Holman was questioning me, and had got me far beyond my depth—in the house-place, when the letters were brought in by one of the men, and I had to pay the carrier for his trouble before I could look at them. A bill—a Canadian letter! What instinct made me so thankful that I was alone with my dear unobservant cousin? What made me hurry them away into my coat-pocket? I do not know. I felt strange and sick, and made irrelevant answers, I am

afraid. Then I went to my room, ostensibly to carry up my boxes. I sate on the side of my bed and opened my letter from Holdsworth. It seemed to me as if I had read its contents before, and knew exactly what he had got to say. I knew he was going to be married to Lucille Ventadour—nay, that he *was* married; for this was the 5th of July, and he wrote word that his marriage was fixed to take place on the 29th of June. I knew all the reasons he gave, all the raptures he went into. I held the letter loosely in my hands, and looked into vacancy; yet I saw a chaffinch's nest on the lichen-covered trunk of an old apple-tree opposite my window, and saw the mother-bird come fluttering in to feed her brood—and yet I did not see it, although it seemed to me afterwards as if I could have drawn every fibre, every feather. I was stirred up to action by the merry sound of voices and the clamp of rustic feet coming home for the mid-day meal. I knew I must go down to dinner; I knew, too, I must tell Phillis; for in his happy egotism, his new-fangled foppery, Holdsworth had put in a P.S., saying that he should send wedding-cards to me and some other Hornby and Eltham acquaintances, and "to his kind friends at Hope Farm." Phillis had faded away to one among several "kind friends." I don't know how I got through dinner that day. I remember forcing myself to eat, and talking hard; but I also recollect the wondering look in the minister's eyes. He was not one to think evil without cause; but many a one would have taken me for drunk. As soon as I decently could, I left the table, saying I would go out for a walk. At first, I must have tried to stun reflection by rapid walking, for I had lost myself on the high moorlands far beyond the familiar gorse-covered common, before I was obliged for very weariness to slacken my pace. I kept wishing—oh! how fervently wishing—I had never committed that blunder; that the one little half-hour's indiscretion could be blotted out. Alternating with this was anger against Holdsworth; unjust enough, I dare say. I suppose I stayed in that solitary place for a good hour or more; and then I turned homewards,

resolving to get over the telling Phillis at the first opportunity, but shrinking from the fulfilment of my resolution so much that, when I came into the house (doors and windows open wide in the sultry weather) and saw Phillis alone in the kitchen, I became quite sick with apprehension. She was standing by the dresser, cutting up a great household loaf into hunches of bread for the hungry labourers who might come in any minute, for the heavy thunderclouds were over-spreading the sky. She looked round as she heard my step.

"You should have been in the field, helping with the hay," said she, in her calm, pleasant voice. I had heard her, as I came near the house, softly chanting some hymn-tune; and the peacefulness of that seemed to be brooding over her now.

"Perhaps I should. It looks as if it was going to rain."

"Yes, there is thunder about. Mother has had to go to bed with one of her bad headaches. Now you are come in"——

"Phillis," said I, rushing at my subject and interrupting her, "I went a long walk to think over a letter I had this morning—a letter from Canada. You don't know how it has grieved me." I held it out to her as I spoke. Her colour changed a little; but it was more the reflection of my face, I think, than because she formed any definite idea from my words. Still she did not take the letter. I had to bid her read it, before she quite understood what I wished. She sate down rather suddenly as she received it into her hands; and, spreading it on the dresser before her, she rested her forehead on the palms of her hands, her arms supported on the table, her figure a little averted, and her countenance thus shaded. I looked out of the open window; my heart was very heavy. How peaceful it all seemed in the farm-yard! Peace and plenty. How still and deep was the silence of the house! Tick-tick went the unseen clock on the wide staircase. I had heard the rustle once, when she turned over the page of thin paper. She must have read to the end. Yet she did not move, or say a word, or even sigh.

I kept on looking out of the window, my hands in my pockets. I wonder how long that time really was? It seemed to me interminable—unbearable. At length I looked round at her. She must have felt my look, for she changed her attitude with a quick sharp movement, and caught my eyes.

"Don't look so sorry, Paul," she said. "Don't, please. I can't bear it. There is nothing to be sorry for. I think not, at least. You have not done wrong, at any rate." I felt that I groaned, but I don't think she heard me. "And he—there's no wrong in his marrying, is there? I'm sure I hope he'll be happy. Oh! how I hope it!" These last words were like a wail; but I believe she was afraid of breaking down, for she changed the key in which she spoke, and hurried on. "Lucille—that's our English Lucy, I suppose? Lucille Holdsworth! It's a pretty name; and I hope——I forget what I was going to say. Oh! it was this. Paul, I think we need never speak about this again; only, remember, you are not to be sorry. You have not done wrong; you have been very, *very* kind; and, if I see you looking grieved, I don't know what I might do;—I might break down, you know."

I think she was on the point of doing so then; but the dark storm came dashing down, and the thundercloud broke right above the house, as it seemed. Her mother, roused from sleep, called out for Phillis; the men and women from the hay-field came running into shelter, drenched through. The minister followed, smiling, and not unpleasantly excited by the war of elements; for, by dint of hard work through the long summer's day, the greater part of the hay was safely housed in the barn in the field. Once or twice in the succeeding bustle I came across Phillis, always busy, and, as it seemed to me, always doing the right thing. When I was alone in my own room at night, I allowed myself to feel relieved: and to believe that the worst was over, and was not so very bad after all. But the succeeding days were very miserable. Sometimes I thought it must be my fancy

that falsely represented Phillis to me as strangely changed; for surely, if this idea of mine was well-founded, her parents —her father and mother—her own flesh and blood—would have been the first to perceive it. Yet they went on in their household peace and content; if anything, a little more cheerfully than usual, for the "harvest of the first fruits," as the minister called it, had been more bounteous than usual, and there was plenty all around, in which the humblest labourer was made to share. After the one thunderstorm, came one or two lovely serene summer days, during which the hay was all carried; and then succeeded long soft rains, filling the ears of corn and causing the mown grass to spring afresh. The minister allowed himself a few more hours of relaxation and home enjoyment than usual during this wet spell: hard earth-bound frost was his winter holiday; these wet days, after the hay harvest, his summer holiday. We sate with open windows, the fragrance and the freshness called out by the soft-falling rain filling the house-place; while the quiet ceaseless patter among the leaves outside ought to have had the same lulling effect as all other gentle perpetual sounds, such as mill-wheels and bubbling springs, have on the nerves of happy people. But two of us were not happy. I was sure enough of myself, for one. I was worse than sure—I was wretchedly anxious about Phillis. Ever since that day of the thunderstorm there had been a new, sharp, discordant sound to me in her voice, a sort of jangle in her tone; and her restless eyes had no quietness in them; and her colour came and went, without a cause that I could find out. The minister, happy in ignorance of what most concerned him, brought out his books; his learned volumes and classics. Whether he read and talked to Phillis, or to me, I do not know; but, feeling by instinct that she was not, could not be, attending to the peaceful details, so strange and foreign to the turmoil in her heart, I forced myself to listen, and if possible to understand.

"Look here!" said the minister, tapping the old vellum-bound book he held; "in the first 'Georgic' he speaks of rolling

and irrigation; a little further on, he insists on choice of the best seed, and advises us to keep the drains clear. Again, no Scotch farmer could give shrewder advice than to cut light meadows while the dew is on, even though it involve night-work. It is all living truth in these days." He began beating time with a ruler upon his knee, to some Latin lines he read aloud just then. I suppose the monotonous chant irritated Phillis to some irregular energy, for I remember the quick knotting and breaking of the thread with which she was sewing. I never hear that snap repeated now, without suspecting some sting or stab troubling the heart of the worker. Cousin Holman, at her peaceful knitting, noticed the reason why Phillis had so constantly to interrupt the progress of her seam.

"It is bad thread, I'm afraid," she said, in a gentle, sympathetic voice. But it was too much for Phillis.

"The thread is bad—everything is bad—I am so tired of it all!" And she put down her work, and hastily left the room. I do not suppose that in all her life Phillis had ever shown so much temper before. In many a family the tone, the manner, would not have been noticed; but here it fell with a sharp surprise upon the sweet, calm atmosphere of home. The minister put down ruler and book, and pushed his spectacles up to his forehead. The mother looked distressed for a moment, and then smoothed her features and said in an explanatory tone—"It's the weather, I think. Some people feel it different to others. It always brings on a headache with me." She got up to follow her daughter, but half-way to the door she thought better of it, and came back to her seat. Good mother! she hoped the better to conceal the unusual spirt of temper, by pretending not to take much notice of it. "Go on, minister," she said; "it is very interesting what you are reading about; and, when I don't quite understand it, I like the sound of your voice." So he went on, but languidly and irregularly, and beat no more time with his ruler to any Latin lines. When the dusk came on, early that July night because of the cloudy

sky, Phillis came softly back, making as though nothing had happened. She took up her work, but it was too dark to do many stitches; and she dropped it soon. Then I saw her hand steal into her mother's, and how this latter fondled it with quiet little caresses, while the minister, as fully aware as I was of this tender pantomime, went on talking in a happier tone of voice about things as uninteresting to him, at the time, I verily believe, as they were to me; and that is saying a good deal, and shows how much more real what was passing before him was, even to a farmer, than the agricultural customs of the ancients.

I remember one thing more—an attack which Betty the servant made upon me one day, as I came in through the kitchen where she was churning, and stopped to ask her for a drink of butter-milk.

"I say, cousin Paul" (she had adopted the family habit of addressing me generally as cousin Paul, and always speaking of me in that form), "something's amiss with our Phillis, and I reckon you've a good guess what it is. She's not one to take up wi' such as you" (not complimentary, but that Betty never was, even to those for whom she felt the highest respect); "but I'd as lief yon Holdsworth had never come near us. So there you've a bit o' my mind."

And a very unsatisfactory bit it was. I did not know what to answer to the glimpse at the real state of the case implied in the shrewd woman's speech; so I tried to put her off by assuming surprise at her first assertion.

"Amiss with Phillis! I should like to know why you think anything is wrong with her. She looks as blooming as any one can do."

"Poor lad! you're but a big child, after all; and you've likely never heared of a fever-flush. But you know better nor that, my fine fellow! so don't think for to put me off wi' blooms and blossoms and such-like talk. What makes her walk about for hours and hours o' nights, when she used to be abed and asleep? I sleep next room to her, and hear her plain as can be. What makes her come in panting and

ready to drop into that chair"—nodding to one close to the door—"and it's 'Oh! Betty, some water, please'? That's the way she comes in now, when she used to come back as fresh and bright as she went out. If yon friend o' yours has played her false, he's a deal for t' answer for: she's a lass who's as sweet and as sound as a nut, and the very apple of her father's eye, and of her mother's too, only wi' her she ranks second to th' minister. You'll have to look after yon chap; for I, for one, will stand no wrong to our Phillis."

What was I to do, or to say? I wanted to justify Holdsworth, to keep Phillis's secret, and to pacify the woman all in the same breath. I did not take the best course, I'm afraid.

"I don't believe Holdsworth ever spoke a word of—of love to her in all his life. I am sure he didn't."

"Ay, ay! but there's eyes, and there's hands, as well as tongues; and a man has two o' th' one and but one o' t'other."

"And she's so young; do you suppose her parents would not have seen it?"

"Well! if you ax me that, I'll say out boldly, 'No.' They've called her 'the child' so long—'the child' is always their name for her when they talk on her between themselves, as if never anybody else had a ewe-lamb before them—that she's grown up to be a woman under their very eyes, and they look on her still as if she were in her long-clothes. And you ne'er heard on a man falling in love wi' a babby in long-clothes!"

"No!" said I, half-laughing. But she went on as grave as a judge.

"Ay! you see you'll laugh at the bare thought on it—and I'll be bound th' minister, though he's not a laughing man, would ha' sniggled at th' notion of falling in love wi' the child. Where's Holdsworth off to?"

"Canada," said I shortly.

"Canada here, Canada there," she replied testily. "Tell me how far he's off, instead of giving me your gibberish. Is he a two days' journey away? or a three? or a week?"

"He's ever so far off—three weeks at the least," cried I in despair. "And he's either married, or just going to be. So there!" I expected a fresh burst of anger. But no; the matter was too serious. Betty sate down, and kept silence for a minute or two. She looked so miserable and downcast, that I could not help going on, and taking her a little into my confidence.

"It is quite true what I said. I know he never spoke a word to her. I think he liked her; but it's all over now. The best thing we can do—the best and kindest for her—and I know you love her, Betty"——

"I nursed her in my arms; I gave her little brother his last taste o' earthly food," said Betty, putting her apron up to her eyes.

"Well! don't let us show her we guess that she is grieving; she'll get over it the sooner. Her father and mother don't even guess at it, and we must make as if we didn't. It's too late now to do anything else."

"I'll never let on; I know nought. I've known true love mysel', in my day. But I wish he'd been farred before he ever came near this house, with his 'Please Betty' this, and 'Please Betty' that, and drinking up our new milk as if he'd been a cat. I hate such beguiling ways."

I thought it was as well to let her exhaust herself in abusing the absent Holdsworth; if it was shabby and treacherous in me, I came in for my punishment directly.

"It's a caution to a man how he goes about beguiling. Some men do it as easy and innocent as cooing doves. Don't you be none of 'em, my lad. Not that you've got the gifts to do it, either; you're no great shakes to look at, neither for figure nor yet for face; and it would need be a deaf adder to be taken in wi' your words, though there may be no great harm in 'em." A lad of nineteen or twenty is not flattered by such an outspoken opinion even from the oldest and ugliest of her sex; and I was only too glad to change the subject by my repeated injunctions to keep Phillis's secret. The end of our conversation was this speech of hers—

"You great gaupus, for all you're called cousin o' th' minister—many a one is cursed wi' fools for cousins—d'ye think I can't see sense except through your spectacles? I give you leave to cut out my tongue, and nail it up on th' barn-door for a caution to magpies, if I let out on that poor wench, either to herself, or any one that is hers, as the Bible says. Now you've heard me speak Scripture language, perhaps you'll be content, and leave me my kitchen to myself."

During all these days, from the 5th of July to the 17th, I must have forgotten what Holdsworth had said about sending cards. And yet I think I could not have quite forgotten; but, once having told Phillis about his marriage, I must have looked upon the after-consequence of cards as of no importance. At any rate, they came upon me as a surprise at last. The penny-post reform, as people call it, had come into operation a short time before; but the never-ending stream of notes and letters which seems now to flow in upon most households had not yet begun its course; at least in those remote parts. There was a post-office at Hornby; and an old fellow, who stowed away the few letters in any or all his pockets, as it best suited him, was the letter-carrier to Heathbridge and the neighbourhood. I have often met him in the lanes thereabouts, and asked him for letters. Sometimes I have come upon him, sitting on the hedge-bank resting; and he has begged me to read him an address, too illegible for his spectacled eyes to decipher. When I used to inquire if he had anything for me, or for Holdsworth (he was not particular to whom he gave up the letters, so that he got rid of them somehow, and could set off homewards), he would say he thought that he had, for such was his invariable safe form of answer; and would fumble in breast-pockets, waistcoat-pockets, breeches-pockets, and, as a last resource, in coat-tail pockets; and at length try to comfort me, if I looked disappointed, by telling me, "Hoo had missed this toime, but was sure to write to-morrow;" "hoo" representing an imaginary sweetheart.

Sometimes I had seen the minister bring home a letter which he had found lying for him at the little shop that was the post-office at Heathbridge, or from the grander establishment at Hornby. Once or twice Josiah, the carter, remembered that the old letter-carrier had trusted him with an epistle to "Measter," as they had met in the lanes. I think it must have been about ten days after my arrival at the farm, and my talk to Phillis cutting bread-and-butter at the kitchen dresser, before the day on which the minister suddenly spoke at the dinner-table, and said—

"By-the-bye, I've got a letter in my pocket. Reach me my coat here, Phillis." The weather was still sultry, and for coolness and ease the minister was sitting in his shirt-sleeves. "I went to Heathbridge about the paper they had sent me, which spoils all the pens—and I called at the post-office, and found a letter for me, unpaid—and they did not like to trust it to old Zekiel. Ay! here it is! Now we shall hear news of Holdsworth—I thought I'd keep it till we were all together." My heart seemed to stop beating, and I hung my head over my plate, not daring to look up. What would come of it now? What was Phillis doing? How was she looking? A moment of suspense—and then he spoke again. "Why? what's this? Here are two visiting-tickets with his name on; no writing at all. No! it's not his name on both. Mrs. Holdsworth. The young man has gone and got married." I lifted my head at these words; I could not help looking just for one instant at Phillis. It seemed to me as if she had been keeping watch over my face and ways. Her face was brilliantly flushed; her eyes were dry and glittering; but she did not speak; her lips were set together, almost as if she was pinching them tight to prevent words or sounds coming out. Cousin Holman's face expressed surprise and interest.

"Well!" said she, "who'd ha' thought it? He's made quick work of his wooing and wedding. I'm sure I wish him happy. Let me see"—counting on her fingers—"October, November, December, January, February, March,

April, May, June, July—at least we're at the 28th—it is nearly ten months after all, and reckon a month each way off"——

"Did you know of this news before?" said the minister, turning sharp round on me, surprised, I suppose, at my silence—hardly suspicious, as yet.

"I knew—I had heard—something. It is to a French Canadian young lady," I went on, forcing myself to talk. "Her name is Ventadour."

"Lucille Ventadour!" said Phillis, in a sharp voice, out of tune.

"Then you knew, too!" exclaimed the minister.

We both spoke at once. I said, "I heard of the probability of——, and told Phillis." She said, "He is married to Lucille Ventadour, of French descent; one of a large family near St. Meurice; am not I right?" I nodded. "Paul told me—that is all we know, is not it? Did you see the Howsons, father, in Heathbridge?" and she forced herself to talk more than she had done for several days; asking many questions; trying, as I could see, to keep the conversation off the one raw surface, on which to touch was agony. I had less self-command; but I followed her lead. I was not so much absorbed in the conversation but what I could see that the minister was puzzled and uneasy; though he seconded Phillis's efforts to prevent her mother from recurring to the great piece of news, and uttering continual exclamations of wonder and surprise. But, with that one exception, we were all disturbed out of our natural equanimity, more or less. Every day, every hour, I was reproaching myself more and more for my blundering officiousness. If only I had held my foolish tongue for that one half-hour; if only I had not been in such impatient haste to do something to relieve pain! I could have knocked my stupid head against the wall in my remorse. Yet all I could do now was to second the brave girl in her efforts to conceal her disappointment and keep her maidenly secret. But I thought that dinner would never, never come to an

end. I suffered for her, even more than for myself. Until now, everything which I had heard spoken in that happy household were simple words of true meaning. If we had aught to say, we said it; and if any one preferred silence, nay, if all did so, there would have been no spasmodic, forced efforts to talk for the sake of talking, or to keep off intrusive thoughts or suspicions.

At length we got up from our places, and prepared to disperse; but two or three of us had lost our zest and interest in the daily labour. The minister stood looking out of the window in silence; and, when he roused himself to go out to the fields where his labourers were working, it was with a sigh; and he tried to avert his troubled face, as he passed us on his way to the door. When he had left us, I caught sight of Phillis's face, as, thinking herself unobserved, her countenance relaxed for a moment or two into sad, woeful weariness. She started into briskness again when her mother spoke, and hurried away to do some little errand at her bidding. When we two were alone, cousin Holman recurred to Holdsworth's marriage. She was one of those people who like to view an event from every side of probability, or even possibility; and she had been cut short from indulging herself in this way during dinner.

"To think of Mr. Holdsworth's being married! I can't get over it, Paul. Not but what he was a very nice young man! I don't like her name, though; it sounds foreign. Say it again, my dear. I hope she'll know how to take care of him, English fashion. He is not strong; and, if she does not see that his things are well aired, I should be afraid of the old cough."

"He always said he was stronger than he had ever been before, after that fever."

"He might think so; but I have my doubts. He was a very pleasant young man; but he did not stand nursing very well. He got tired of being coddled, as he called it. I hope they'll soon come back to England, and then he'll have a chance for his health. I wonder, now, if she speaks English;

but, to be sure, he can speak foreign tongues like anything, as I've heard the minister say."

And so we went on for some time, till she became drowsy over her knitting, on the sultry summer afternoon; and I stole away for a walk, for I wanted some solitude in which to think over things, and, alas! to blame myself with poignant stabs of remorse.

I lounged lazily as soon as I got to the wood. Here and there, the bubbling, brawling brook circled round a great stone, or a root of an old tree, and made a pool; otherwise it coursed brightly over the gravel and stones. I stood by one of these for more than half-an-hour, or, indeed, longer, throwing bits of wood or pebbles into the water, and wondering what I could do to remedy the present state of things. Of course all my meditation was of no use; and, at length, the distant sound of the horn employed to tell the men far afield to leave off work warned me that it was six o'clock, and time for me to go home. Then I caught wafts of the loud-voiced singing of the evening psalm. As I was crossing the ash-field, I saw the minister at some distance talking to a man. I could not hear what they were saying; but I saw an impatient or dissentient (I could not tell which) gesture on the part of the former, who walked quickly away, and was apparently absorbed in his thoughts; for, though he passed within twenty yards of me, as both our paths converged towards home, he took no notice of me. We passed the evening in a way which was even worse than dinner-time. The minister was silent, depressed, even irritable. Poor cousin Holman was utterly perplexed by this unusual frame of mind and temper in her husband; she was not well herself, and was suffering from the extreme and sultry heat, which made her less talkative than usual. Phillis, usually so reverently tender to her parents, so soft, so gentle, seemed now to take no notice of the unusual state of things, but talked to me—to any one—on indifferent subjects, regardless of her father's gravity, of her mother's piteous looks of bewilderment. But once my eyes fell upon her hands,

concealed under the table, and I could see the passionate, convulsive manner in which she laced and interlaced her fingers perpetually, wringing them together from time to time, wringing till the compressed flesh became perfectly white. What could I do? I talked with her, as I saw she wished; her grey eyes had dark circles round them, and a strange kind of dark light in them; her cheeks were flushed, but her lips were white and wan. I wondered that others did not read these signs as clearly as I did. But perhaps they did; I think, from what came afterwards, the minister did.

Poor cousin Holman! she worshipped her husband; and the outward signs of his uneasiness were more patent to her simple heart than were her daughter's. After a while, she could bear it no longer. She got up, and, softly laying her hand on his broad stooping shoulder, she said—

"What is the matter, minister? Has anything gone wrong?"

He started as if from a dream. Phillis hung her head, and caught her breath in terror at the answer she feared. But he, looking round with a sweeping glance, turned his broad, wise face up to his anxious wife, and forced a smile, and took her hand in a reassuring manner.

"I am blaming myself, dear. I have been overcome with anger this afternoon. I scarcely knew what I was doing, but I turned away Timothy Cooper. He has killed the Ribstone pippin at the corner of the orchard; gone and piled the quicklime for the mortar for the new stable-wall against the trunk of the tree—stupid fellow! killed the tree outright—and it loaded with apples!"

"And Ribstone pippins are so scarce," said sympathetic cousin Holman.

"Ay! But Timothy is but a half-wit; and he has a wife and children. He had often put me to it sore, with his slothful ways; but I had laid it before the Lord, and striven to bear with him. But I will not stand it any longer; it's past my patience. And he has notice to find another place.

Wife, we won't talk more about it." He took her hand gently off his shoulder; touched it with his lips; but relapsed into a silence as profound, if not quite so morose in appearance, as before. I could not tell why, but this bit of talk between her father and mother seemed to take all the factitious spirits out of Phillis. She did not speak now, but looked out of the open casement at the calm large moon, slowly moving through the twilight sky. Once I thought her eyes were filling with tears; but, if so, she shook them off, and arose with alacrity when her mother, tired and dispirited, proposed to go to bed immediately after prayers. We all said good-night in our separate ways to the minister, who still sat at the table with the great Bible open before him, not much looking up at any of our salutations, but returning them kindly. But when I, last of all, was on the point of leaving the room, he said, still scarcely looking up—

"Paul, you will oblige me by staying here a few minutes. I would fain have some talk with you."

I knew what was coming, all in a moment. I carefully shut-to the door, put out my candle, and sat down to my fate. He seemed to find some difficulty in beginning, for, if I had not heard that he wanted to speak to me, I should never have guessed it, he seemed so much absorbed in reading a chapter to the end. Suddenly he lifted his head up and said—

"It is about that friend of yours, Holdsworth! Paul, have you any reason for thinking he has played tricks upon Phillis?"

I saw that his eyes were blazing with such a fire of anger at the bare idea, that I lost all my presence of mind, and only repeated—

"Played tricks on Phillis!"

"Ay! you know what I mean: made love to her, courted her, made her think that he loved her, and then gone away and left her. Put it as you will; only give me an answer of some kind or another—a true answer, I mean—and don't repeat my words, Paul."

He was shaking all over, as he said this. I did not delay a moment in answering him—

"I do not believe that Edward Holdsworth ever played tricks on Phillis, ever made love to her; he never, to my knowledge, made her believe that he loved her."

I stopped; I wanted to nerve up my courage for a confession, yet I wished to save the secret of Phillis's love for Holdsworth, as much as I could; that secret which she had so striven to keep sacred and safe; and I had need of some reflection, before I went on with what I had to say.

He began again, before I had quite arranged my manner of speech. It was almost as if to himself—"She is my only child; my little daughter! She is hardly out of childhood; I have thought to gather her under my wings for years to come; her mother and I would lay down our lives to keep her from harm and grief." Then, raising his voice, and looking at me, he said, "Something has gone wrong with the child; and it seems to me to date from the time she heard of that marriage. It is hard to think that you may know more of her secret cares and sorrows than I do—but perhaps you do, Paul, perhaps you do—only, if it be not a sin, tell me what I can do to make her happy again; tell me!"

"It will not do much good, I am afraid," said I; "but I will own how wrong I did; I don't mean wrong in the way of sin, but in the way of judgment. Holdsworth told me just before he went that he loved Phillis, and hoped to make her his wife; and I told her."

There! it was out; all my part in it, at least; and I set my lips tight together, and waited for the words to come. I did not see his face; I looked straight at the wall opposite; but I heard him once begin to speak, and then turn over the leaves in the book before him. How awfully still that room was! The air outside, how still it was! The open window let in no rustle of leaves, no twitter or movement of birds—no sound whatever. The clock on the stairs—the minister's hard breathing—was it to go on for ever? Impatient beyond bearing at the deep quiet, I spoke again—

"I did it for the best, as I thought."

The minister shut the book to hastily, and stood up. Then I saw how angry he was.

"For the best, do you say? It was best, was it, to go and tell a young girl what you never told a word of to her parents, who trusted you like a son of their own?"

He began walking about, up and down the room, close under the open windows, churning up his bitter thoughts of me.

"To put such thoughts into the child's head!" continued he; "to spoil her peaceful maidenhood with talk about another man's love; and such love, too!"—he spoke scornfully now—"a love that is ready for any young woman! Oh, the misery in my poor little daughter's face to-day at dinner—the misery, Paul! I thought you were one to be trusted—your father's son too, to go and put such thoughts into the child's mind; you two talking together about that man wishing to marry her!"

I could not help remembering the pinafore, the childish garment which Phillis wore so long, as if her parents were unaware of her progress towards womanhood. Just in the same way, the minister spoke and thought of her now, as a child, whose innocent peace I had spoiled by vain and foolish talk. I knew that the truth was different, though I could hardly have told it now; but, indeed, I never thought of trying to tell; it was far from my mind to add one iota to the sorrow which I had caused. The minister went on walking, occasionally stopping to move things on the table, or articles of furniture, in a sharp, impatient, meaningless way, then he began again—

"So young, so pure from the world! how could you go and talk to such a child, raising hopes, exciting feelings—all to end thus; and best so, even though I saw her poor piteous face look as it did? I can't forgive you, Paul; it was more than wrong—it was wicked—to go and repeat that man's words."

His back was now to the door; and, in listening to his

low angry tones, he did not hear it slowly open, nor did he see Phillis, standing just within the room, until he turned round; then he stood still. She must have been half undressed; but she had covered herself with a dark winter cloak, which fell in long folds to her white, naked, noiseless feet. Her face was strangely pale; her eyes heavy in the black circles round them. She came up to the table very slowly, and leant her hand upon it, saying mournfully—

"Father, you must not blame Paul. I could not help hearing a great deal of what you were saying. He did tell me, and perhaps it would have been wiser not, dear Paul! But—oh, dear! oh, dear! I am so sick with shame! He told me out of his kind heart, because he saw—that I was so very unhappy at *his* going away."

She hung her head, and leant more heavily than before on her supporting hand.

"I don't understand," said her father; but he was beginning to understand. Phillis did not answer, till he asked her again. I could have struck him now for his cruelty; but, then, I knew all.

"I loved him, father!" she said at length, raising her eyes to the minister's face.

"Had he ever spoken of love to you? Paul says not!"

"Never." She let fall her eyes, and drooped more than ever. I almost thought she would fall.

"I could not have believed it," said he, in a hard voice, yet sighing the moment he had spoken. A dead silence for a moment. "Paul! I was unjust to you. You deserved blame, but not all that I said." Then again a silence. I thought I saw Phillis's white lips moving, but it might be the flickering of the candle-light—a moth had flown in through the open casement, and was fluttering round the flame; I might have saved it, but I did not care to do so, my heart was too full of other things. At any rate, no sound was heard for long endless minutes. Then he said—"Phillis! did we not make you happy here? Have we not loved you enough?"

She did not seem to understand the drift of this question; she looked up as if bewildered, and her beautiful eyes dilated with a painful, tortured expression. He went on, without noticing the look on her face; he did not see it, I am sure.

"And yet you would have left us, left your home, left your father and your mother, and gone away with this stranger, wandering over the world!"

He suffered, too; there were tones of pain in the voice in which he uttered this reproach. Probably, the father and daughter were never so far apart in their lives, so unsympathetic. Yet some new terror came over her, and it was to him she turned for help. A shadow came over her face, and she tottered towards her father; falling down, her arms across his knees, and moaning out—

"Father, my head! my head!" and then she slipped through his quick-enfolding arms, and lay on the ground at his feet.

I shall never forget his sudden look of agony while I live; never! We raised her up; her colour had strangely darkened; she was insensible. I ran through the back-kitchen to the yard-pump, and brought back water. The minister had her on his knees, her head against his breast, almost as though she were a sleeping child. He was trying to rise up with his poor precious burden; but the momentary terror had robbed the strong man of his strength, and he sank back in his chair with sobbing breath.

"She is not dead, Paul! is she?" he whispered, hoarse, as I came near him.

I, too, could not speak, but I pointed to the quivering of the muscles round her mouth. Just then cousin Holman, attracted by some unwonted sound, came down. I remember I was surprised at the time at her presence of mind: she seemed to know so much better what to do than the minister, in the midst of the sick affright which blanched her countenance, and made her tremble all over. I think now that it was the recollection of what had gone before; the

miserable thought that possibly his words had brought on this attack, whatever it might be, that so unmanned the minister. We carried her upstairs; and, while the women were putting her to bed, still unconscious, still slightly convulsed, I slipped out, and saddled one of the horses, and rode as fast as the heavy-trotting beast could go, to Hornby, to find the doctor there, and bring him back. He was out; might be detained the whole night. I remember saying, "God help us all!" as I sate on my horse, under the window, through which the apprentice's head had appeared to answer my furious tugs at the night-bell. He was a good-natured fellow. He said—

"He may be home in half-an-hour, there's no knowing; but I dare say he will. I'll send him out to the Hope Farm directly he comes in. It's that good-looking young woman, Holman's daughter, that's ill, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"It would be a pity if she was to go. She's an only child, isn't she? I'll get up, and smoke a pipe in the surgery, ready for the governor's coming home. I might go to sleep if I went to bed again."

"Thank you, you're a good fellow!" and I rode back almost as quickly as I came.

It was a brain-fever. The doctor said so, when he came in the early summer morning. I believe we had come to know the nature of the illness in the night-watches that had gone before. As to hope of ultimate recovery, or even evil prophecy of the probable end, the cautious doctor would be entrapped into neither. He gave his directions, and promised to come again: so soon, that this one thing showed his opinion of the gravity of the case.

By God's mercy, she recovered; but it was a long, weary time first. According to previously made plans, I was to have gone home at the beginning of August. But all such ideas were put aside now, without a word being spoken. I really think that I was necessary in the house, and especially necessary to the minister at this time; my father was the

last man in the world, under such circumstances, to expect me home.

I say, I think I was necessary in the house. Every person (I had almost said every creature, for all the dumb beasts seemed to know and love Phillis) about the place went grieving and sad, as though a cloud was over the sun. They did their work, each striving to steer clear of the temptation to eye-service, in fulfilment of the trust reposed in them by the minister. For, the day after Phillis had been taken ill, he had called all the men employed on the farm into the empty barn; and there he had entreated their prayers for his only child; and, then and there, he had told them of his present incapacity for thought about any other thing in this world but his little daughter, lying nigh unto death, and he had asked them to go on with their daily labours as best they could, without his direction. So, as I say, these honest men did their work to the best of their ability; but they slouched along with sad and careful faces, coming one by one in the dim mornings to ask news of the sorrow that overshadowed the house, and receiving Betty's intelligence, always rather darkened by passing through her mind, with slow shakes of the head, and a dull wistfulness of sympathy. But, poor fellows, they were hardly fit to be trusted with hasty messages; and here my poor services came in. One time, I was to ride hard to Sir William Bentinck's, and petition for ice out of his ice-house, to put on Phillis's head. Another, it was to Eltham I must go, by train, horse, anyhow, and bid the doctor there come for a consultation; for fresh symptoms had appeared, which Mr. Brown, of Hornby, considered unfavourable. Many an hour have I sate on the window-seat, half-way up the stairs, close by the old clock, listening in the hot stillness of the house for the sounds in the sick-room. The minister and I met often, but spoke together seldom. He looked so old—so old! He shared the nursing with his wife; the strength that was needed seemed to be given to them both in that day. They required no one else about their child. Every

office about her was sacred to them; even Betty only went into the room for the most necessary purposes. Once I saw Phillis through the open door; her pretty golden hair had been cut off long before; her head was covered with wet cloths, and she was moving it backwards and forwards on the pillow, with weary, never-ending motion, her poor eyes shut, trying in the old-accustomed way to croon out a hymn tune, but perpetually breaking it up into moans of pain. Her mother sate by her, tearless, changing the cloths upon her head with patient solicitude. I did not see the minister at first; but there he was, in a dark corner, down upon his knees, his hands clasped together in passionate prayer. Then the door shut, and I saw no more.

One day he was wanted; and I had to summon him. Brother Robinson and another minister, hearing of his "trial", had come to see him. I told him this upon the stair-landing in a whisper. He was strangely troubled.

"They will want me to lay bare my heart. I cannot do it. Paul, stay with me! They mean well; but as for spiritual help at such a time—it is God only, God only, who can give it."

So I went in with him. They were two ministers from the neighbourhood; both older than Ebenezer Holman, but evidently inferior to him in education and worldly position. I thought they looked at me as if I were an intruder; but, remembering the minister's words, I held my ground, and took up one of poor Phillis's books (of which I could not read a word) to have an ostensible occupation. Presently I was asked to "engage in prayer"; and we all knelt down, Brother Robinson "leading," and quoting largely, as I remember, from the Book of Job. He seemed to take for his text, if texts are ever taken for prayers, "Behold, thou hast instructed many; but now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled." When we others rose up, the minister continued for some minutes on his knees. Then he too got up, and stood facing us, for a moment, before we all sate down in conclave. After a pause Robinson began—

"We grieve for you, Brother Holman, for your trouble is great. But we would fain have you remember you are as a light set on a hill; and the congregations are looking at you with watchful eyes. We have been talking as we came along on the two duties required of you in this strait, Brother Hodgson and me. And we have resolved to exhort you on these two points. First, God has given you the opportunity of showing forth an example of resignation." Poor Mr. Holman visibly winced at this word. I could fancy how he had tossed aside such brotherly preachings in his happier moments; but now his whole system was unstrung, and "resignation" seemed a term which presupposed that the dreaded misery of losing Phillis was inevitable. But good, stupid Mr. Robinson went on. "We hear on all sides that there are scarce any hopes of your child's recovery; and it may be well to bring you to mind of Abraham; and how he was willing to kill his only child when the Lord commanded. Take example by him, Brother Holman. Let us hear you say, 'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord!' "

There was a pause of expectancy. I verily believe the minister tried to feel it; but he could not. Heart of flesh was too strong. Heart of stone he had not.

"I will say it to my God, when He gives me strength—when the day comes," he spoke at last.

The other two looked at each other, and shook their heads. I think the reluctance to answer as they wished was not quite unexpected. The minister went on: "There are hopes yet," he said, as if to himself. "God has given me a great heart for hoping, and I will not look forward beyond the hour." Then, turning more to them, and speaking louder, he added: "Brethren, God will strengthen me when the time comes, when such resignation as you speak of is needed. Till then I cannot feel it; and what I do not feel I will not express, using words as if they were a charm." He was getting chafed, I could see.

He had rather put them out by these speeches of his; but

after a short time and some more shakes of the head, Robinson began again—

"Secondly, we would have you listen to the voice of the rod, and ask yourself for what sins this trial has been laid upon you: whether you may not have been too much given up to your farm and your cattle; whether this world's learning has not puffed you up to vain conceit and neglect of the things of God; whether you have not made an idol of your daughter?"

"I cannot answer—I will not answer!" exclaimed the minister. "My sins I confess to God. But if they were scarlet—and they are so in His sight," he added humbly—"I hold with Christ that afflictions are not sent by God in wrath as penalties for sin."

"Is that orthodox, Brother Robinson?" asked the third minister, in a deferential tone of inquiry.

Despite the minister's injunction not to leave him, I thought matters were getting so serious that a little homely interruption would be more to the purpose than my continued presence, and I went round to the kitchen to ask for Betty's help.

"'Od rot 'em!" said she; "they're always a-coming at illconvenient times; and they have such hearty appetites, they'll make nothing of what would have served master and you since our poor lass has been ill. I've but a bit of cold beef in th' house; but I'll do some ham and eggs, and that 'll rout 'em from worrying the minister. They're a deal quieter after they've had their victual. Last time as old Robinson came, he was very reprehensible upon master's learning, which he couldn't compass to save his life, so he needn't have been afeared of that temptation, and used words long enough to have knocked a body down; but after me and missus had given him his fill of victual, and he'd had some good ale and a pipe, he spoke just like any other man, and could crack a joke with me."

Their visit was the only break in the long weary days and nights. I do not mean that no other inquiries were made.

I believe that all the neighbours hung about the place daily, till they could learn from some out-comer how Phillis Holman was. But they knew better than to come up to the house; for the August weather was so hot that every door and window was kept constantly open, and the least sound outside penetrated all through. I am sure the cocks and hens had a sad time of it; for Betty drove them all into an empty barn, and kept them fastened up in the dark for several days, with very little effect as regarded their crowing and clacking. At length came a sleep which was the crisis, and from which she wakened up with a new faint life. Her slumber had lasted many, many hours. We scarcely dared to breathe or move during the time; we had striven to hope so long, that we were sick at heart, and durst not trust in the favourable signs: the even breathing, the moistened skin, the slight return of delicate colour into the pale, wan lips. I recollect stealing out that evening in the dusk, and wandering down the grassy lane, under the shadow of the over-arching elms to the little bridge at the foot of the hill, where the lane to the Hope Farm joined another road to Hornby. On the low parapet of that bridge I found Timothy Cooper, the stupid, half-witted labourer, sitting, idly throwing bits of mortar into the brook below. He just looked up at me as I came near, but gave me no greeting, either by word or gesture. He had generally made some sign of recognition to me; but this time I thought he was sullen at being dismissed. Nevertheless, I felt as if it would be a relief to talk a little to some one, and I sate down by him. While I was thinking how to begin, he yawned wearily.

"You are tired, Tim," said I.

"Ay," said he. "But I reckon I may go home now."

"Have you been sitting here long?"

"Welly all day long. Leastways sin' seven i' th' morning."

"Why, what in the world have you been doing?"

"Nought."

"Why have you been sitting here, then?"

"T' keep carts off." He was up now, stretching himself, and shaking his lubberly limbs.

"Carts! what carts?"

"Carts as might ha' wakened yon wench! It's Hornby market-day. I reckon yo're no better nor a half-wit yoursel'." He cocked his eye at me, as if he were gauging my intellect.

"And have you been sitting here all day to keep the lane quiet?"

"Ay. I've nought else to do. Th' minister has turned me adrift. Have yo' heard how th' lass is faring to-night?"

"They hope she'll waken better for this long sleep. Good-night to you, and God bless you, Timothy!" said I.

He scarcely took any notice of my words, as he lumbered across a stile that led to his cottage. Presently, I went home to the farm. Phillis had stirred, had spoken two or three faint words. Her mother was with her, dropping nourishment into her scarce conscious mouth. The rest of the household were summoned to evening prayer, for the first time for many days. It was a return to the daily habits of happiness and health. But in these silent days our very lives had been an unspoken prayer. Now, we met in the house-place, and looked at each other with strange recognition of the thankfulness on all our faces. We knelt down; we waited for the minister's voice. He did not begin as usual. He could not; he was choking. Presently we heard the strong man's sob. Then old John turned round on his knees, and said—

"Minister, I reckon we have blessed the Lord wi' all our souls though we've ne'er talked about it; and maybe He'll not need spoken words this night. God bless us all, and keep our Phillis safe from harm! Amen."

Old John's impromptu prayer was all we had that night.

"Our Phillis," as he had called her, grew better day by day from that time. Not quickly; I sometimes grew desponding, and feared that she would never be what she had been before; no more she has, in some ways.

I seized an early opportunity to tell the minister about Timothy Cooper's unsolicited watch on the bridge during the long summer's day.

"God forgive me!" said the minister. "I have been too proud in my own conceit. The first steps I take out of this house shall be to Cooper's cottage."

I need hardly say Timothy was reinstated in his place on the farm; and I have often since admired the patience with which his master tried to teach him how to do the easy work which was henceforward carefully adjusted to his capacity.

Phillis was carried downstairs, and lay for hour after hour quite silent on the great sofa, drawn up under the windows of the house-place. She seemed always the same—gentle, quiet, and sad. Her energy did not return with her bodily strength. It was sometimes pitiful to see her parents' vain endeavours to rouse her to interest. One day the minister brought her a set of blue ribbons, reminding her with a tender smile of a former conversation, in which she had owned to a love of such feminine vanities. She spoke gratefully to him; but, when he was gone, she laid them on one side, and languidly shut her eyes. Another time I saw her mother bring her the Latin and Italian books that she had been so fond of before her illness—or, rather, before Holdsworth had gone away. That was worst of all. She turned her face to the wall, and cried as soon as her mother's back was turned. Betty was laying the cloth for the early dinner. Her sharp eyes saw the state of the case.

"Now, Phillis!" said she, coming up to the sofa; "we ha' done a' we can for you, and th' doctors has done a' they can for you, and I think the Lord has done a' He can for you, and more than you deserve, too, if you don't do something for yourself. If I were you, I'd rise up and snuff the moon, sooner than break your father's and your mother's hearts wi' watching and waiting, till it pleases you to fight your own way back to cheerfulness. There, I never favoured long preachings, and I've said my say."

A day or two after, Phillis asked me, when we were alone,

if I thought my father and mother would allow her to go and stay with them for a couple of months. She blushed a little, as she faltered out her wish for change of thought and scene.

"Only for a short time, Paul! Then—we will go back to the peace of the old days. I know we shall; I can, and I will!"

LOIS THE WITCH

CHAPTER I

In the year 1691, Lois Barclay stood on a little wooden pier, steadying herself on the stable land, in much the same manner as, eight or nine weeks ago, she had tried to steady herself on the deck of the rocking ship which had carried her across from Old to New England. It seemed as strange now to be on solid earth as it had been, not long ago, to be rocked by the sea both by day and by night; and the aspect of the land was equally strange. The forests which showed in the distance all around, and which, in truth, were not very far from the wooden houses forming the town of Boston, were of different shades of green, and different, too, in shape of outline to those which Lois Barclay knew well in her old home in Warwickshire. Her heart sank a little as she stood alone, waiting for the captain of the good ship *Redemption*, the kind, rough old sailor, who was her only known friend in this unknown continent. Captain Holdernesse was busy, however, as she saw, and it would probably be some time before he would be ready to attend to her; so Lois sat down on one of the casks that lay about, and wrapped her grey duffle cloak tight around her, and sheltered herself under her hood, as well as might be, from the piercing wind, which seemed to follow those whom it had tyrannised over at sea with a dogged wish of still tormenting them on land. Very patiently did Lois sit there, although she was weary, and shivering with cold; for the day was severe for May, and

the *Redemption*, with store of necessaries and comforts for the Puritan colonists of New England, was the earliest ship that had ventured across the seas.

How could Lois help thinking of the past, and speculating on the future, as she sat on Boston pier, at this breathing-time of her life? In the dim sea mist which she gazed upon with aching eyes (filled, against her will, with tears, from time to time), there rose the little village church of Barford (not three miles from Warwick—you may see it yet), where her father had preached ever since 1661, long before she was born. He and her mother both lay dead in Barford churchyard; and the old low grey church could hardly come before her vision without her seeing the old parsonage too, the cottage covered with Austrian roses and yellow jessamine, where she had been born, sole child of parents already long past the prime of youth. She saw the path, not a hundred yards long, from the parsonage to the vestry door: that path which her father trod daily; for the vestry was his study, and the sanctum where he pored over the ponderous tomes of the Fathers, and compared their precepts with those of the authorities of the Anglican Church of that day—the day of the later Stuarts; for Barford Parsonage, at that time, scarcely exceeded in size and dignity the cottages by which it was surrounded: it only contained three rooms on a floor, and was but two storeys high. On the first or ground-floor, were the parlour, kitchen, and back- or working-kitchen; upstairs, Mr. and Mrs. Barclay's room, that belonging to Lois, and the maid-servant's room. If a guest came, Lois left her own chamber, and shared old Clemence's bed. But those days were over. Never more should Lois see father or mother on earth; they slept, calm and still, in Barford churchyard, careless of what became of their orphan child, as far as earthly manifestations of care or love went. And Clemence lay there too, bound down in her grassy bed by withes of the briar-rose, which Lois had trained over those three precious graves before leaving England for ever.

There were some who would fain have kept her there; one who swore in his heart a great oath unto the Lord that he would seek her, sooner or later, if she was still upon the earth. But he was the rich heir and only son of the Miller Lucy, whose mill stood by the Avon side in the grassy Barford meadows; and his father looked higher for him than the penniless daughter of Parson Barclay (so low were clergymen esteemed in those days!); and the very suspicion of Hugh Lucy's attachment to Lois Barclay made his parents think it more prudent not to offer the orphan a home, although none other of the parishioners had the means, even if they had the will, to do so.

So Lois swallowed her tears down till the time came for crying, and acted upon her mother's words—

"Lois, thy father is dead of this terrible fever, and I am dying. Nay, it is so; though I am easier from pain for these few hours, the Lord be praised! The cruel men of the Commonwealth have left thee very friendless. Thy father's only brother was shot down at Edgehill. I, too, have a brother, though thou hast never heard me speak of him, for he was a schismatic; and thy father and me had words, and he left for that new country beyond the seas, without ever saying farewell to us. But Ralph was a kind lad until he took up these new-fangled notions; and for the old days' sake he will take thee in, and love thee as a child, and place thee among his children. Blood is thicker than water. Write to him as soon as I am gone—for, Lois, I am going; and I bless the Lord that has letten me join my husband again so soon." Such was the selfishness of conjugal love; she thought little of Lois's desolation in comparison with her rejoicing over her speedy reunion with her dead husband!

"Write to thine uncle, Ralph Hickson, Salem, New England (put it down, child, on thy tablets), and say that I, Henrietta Barclay, charge him, for the sake of all he holds dear in heaven or on earth—for his salvation's sake, as well as for the sake of the old home at Lester Bridge—for the sake of the father and mother that gave us birth, as well as for the

sake of the six little children who lie dead between him and me—that he take thee into his home as if thou wert his own flesh and blood, as indeed thou art. He has a wife and children of his own, and no one need fear having thee, my Lois, my darling, my baby, among his household. O Lois, would that thou wert dying with me! The thought of thee makes death sore!" Lois comforted her mother more than herself, poor child, by promises to obey her dying wishes to the letter, and by expressing hopes she dared not feel of her uncle's kindness.

"Promise me"—the dying woman's breath came harder and harder—"that thou wilt go at once. The money our goods will bring—the letter thy father wrote to Captain Holdernesse, his old schoolfellow—thou knowest all I would say—my Lois, God bless thee!"

Solemnly did Lois promise; strictly she kept her word. It was all the more easy, for Hugh Lucy met her, and told her, in one great burst of love, of his passionate attachment, his vehement struggles with his father, his impotence at present, his hopes and resolves for the future. And, intermingled with all this, came such outrageous threats and expressions of uncontrolled vehemence, that Lois felt that in Barford she must not linger to be a cause of desperate quarrel between father and son, while her absence might soften down matters, so that either the rich old miller might relent, or—and her heart ached to think of the other possibility—Hugh's love might cool, and the dear playfellow of her childhood learn to forget. If not—if Hugh were to be trusted in one tithe of what he said—God might permit him to fulfil his resolve of coming to seek her out, before many years were over. It was all in God's hands; and that was best, thought Lois Barclay.

She was aroused out of her trance of recollections by Captain Holdernesse, who, having done all that was necessary in the way of orders and directions to his mate, now came up to her, and, praising her for her quiet patience, told her that he would now take her to the Widow Smith's, a

decent kind of house, where he and many other sailors of the better order were in the habit of lodging during their stay on the New England shores. Widow Smith, he said, had a parlour for herself and her daughters, in which Lois might sit, while he went about the business that, as he had told her, would detain him in Boston for a day or two, before he could accompany her to her uncle's at Salem. All this had been to a certain degree arranged on ship-board; but Captain Holdernesse, for want of anything else that he could think of to talk about, recapitulated it, as he and Lois walked along. It was his way of showing sympathy with the emotion that made her grey eyes full of tears, as she started up from the pier at the sound of his voice. In his heart he said, "Poor wench! poor wench! it's a strange land to her, and they are all strange folks, and, I reckon, she will be feeling desolate. I'll try and cheer her up." So he talked on about hard facts, connected with the life that lay before her, until they reached Widow Smith's; and perhaps Lois was more brightened by this style of conversation, and the new ideas it presented to her, than she would have been by the tenderest woman's sympathy.

"They are a queer set, these New Englanders," said Captain Holdernesse. "They are rare chaps for praying; down on their knees at every turn of their life. Folk are none so busy in a new country, else they would have to pray like me, with a 'Yo-hoy!' on each side of my prayer, and a rope cutting like fire through my hand. Yon pilot was for calling us all to thanksgiving for a good voyage, and lucky escape from the pirates; but I said I always put up my thanks on dry land, after I had got my ship into harbour. The French colonists, too, are vowing vengeance for the expedition against Canada, and the people here are raging like heathens—at least, as like as godly folk can be—for the loss of their charter. All that is the news the pilot told me; for, for all he wanted us to be thanksgiving instead of casting the lead, he was as down in the mouth as could be about the state of the country. But here we are at Widow Smith's!

Now, cheer up, and show the godly a pretty smiling Warwickshire lass!"

Anybody would have smiled at Widow Smith's greeting. She was a comely, motherly woman, dressed in the primmest fashion in vogue twenty years before in England, among the class to which she belonged. But, somehow, her pleasant face gave the lie to her dress; were it as brown and sober-coloured as could be, folk remembered it bright and cheerful, because it was a part of Widow Smith herself.

She kissed Lois on both cheeks, before she rightly understood who the stranger maiden was, only because she was a stranger and looked sad and forlorn; and then she kissed her again, because Captain Holdernesse commended her to the widow's good offices. And so she led Lois by the hand into her rough, substantial log-house, over the door of which hung a great bough of a tree, by way of sign of entertainment for man and horse. Yet not all men were received by Widow Smith. To some she could be as cold and reserved as need be, deaf to all inquiries save one—where else they could find accommodation? To this question she would give a ready answer, and speed the unwelcome guest on his way. Widow Smith was guided in these matters by instinct: one glance at a man's face told her whether or not she chose to have him as an inmate of the same house as her daughters; and her promptness of decision in these matters gave her manner a kind of authority which no one liked to disobey, especially as she had stalwart neighbours within call to back her, if her assumed deafness in the first instance, and her voice and gesture in the second, were not enough to give the would-be guest his dismissal. Widow Smith chose her customers merely by their physical aspect; not one whit with regard to their apparent worldly circumstances. Those who had been staying at her house once always came again; for she had the knack of making every one beneath her roof comfortable and at his ease. Her daughters, Prudence and Hester, had somewhat of their mother's gifts, but not in such perfection. They reasoned a little upon a stranger's

appearance, instead of knowing at the first moment whether they liked him or no; they noticed the indications of his clothes, the quality and cut thereof, as telling somewhat of his station in society; they were more reserved; they hesitated more than their mother; they had not her prompt authority, her happy power. Their bread was not so light; their cream went sometimes to sleep, when it should have been turning into butter; their hams were not always "just like the hams of the old country"; as their mother's were invariably pronounced to be—yet they were good, orderly, kindly girls, and rose and greeted Lois with a friendly shake of the hand, as their mother, with her arm round the stranger's waist, led her into the private room which she called her parlour. The aspect of this room was strange in the English girl's eyes. The logs of which the house was built showed here and there through the mud-plaster, although before both plaster and logs were hung the skins of many curious animals—skins presented to the widow by many a trader of her acquaintance, just as her sailor-guests brought her another description of gifts—shells, strings of wampum-beads, sea-birds' eggs, and presents from the old country. The room was more like a small museum of natural history of these days than a parlour; and it had a strange, peculiar, but not unpleasant smell about it, neutralised in some degree by the smoke from the enormous trunk of pinewood which smouldered on the hearth.

The instant their mother told them that Captain Holdernesse was in the outer room, the girls began putting away their spinning-wheel and knitting needles, and preparing for a meal of some kind; what meal, Lois, sitting there and unconsciously watching, could hardly tell. First, dough was set to rise for cakes; then came out of a corner-cupboard—a present from England—an enormous square bottle of a cordial called Gold-Wasser; next, a mill for grinding chocolate—a rare, unusual treat anywhere at that time; then a great Cheshire cheese. Three venison-steaks were cut ready for broiling, fat cold pork sliced up and treacle

poured over it; a great pie, something like a mince-pie, but which the daughters spoke of with honour as the "punken-pie," fresh and salt-fish brandered, oysters cooked in various ways. Lois wondered where would be the end of the provisions for hospitably receiving the strangers from the old country. At length everything was placed on the table, the hot food smoking; but all was cool, not to say cold, before Elder Hawkins (an old neighbour of much repute and standing, who had been invited in by Widow Smith to hear the news) had finished his grace, into which was embodied thanksgiving for the past, and prayers for the future, lives of every individual present, adapted to their several cases, as far as the elder could guess at them from appearances. This grace might not have ended so soon as it did, had it not been for the somewhat impatient drumming of his knife-handle on the table, with which Captain Holdernesse accompanied the latter half of the elder's words.

When they first sat down to their meal, all were too hungry for much talking; but, as their appetites diminished, their curiosity increased, and there was much to be told and heard on both sides. With all the English intelligence Lois was, of course, well acquainted; but she listened with natural attention to all that was said about the new country, and the new people among whom she had come to live. Her father had been a Jacobite, as the adherents of the Stuarts were beginning at this time to be called. His father, again, had been a follower of Archbishop Laud; so Lois had hitherto heard little of the conversation, and seen little of the ways of the Puritans. Elder Hawkins was one of the strictest of the strict, and evidently his presence kept the two daughters of the house considerably in awe. But the widow herself was a privileged person; her known goodness of heart (the effects of which had been experienced by many) gave her the liberty of speech which was tacitly denied to many, under penalty of being esteemed ungodly, if they infringed certain conventional limits. And Captain Holdernesse and his mate spoke out their minds, let who would be present.

So that, on this first landing in New England, Lois was, as it were, gently let down into the midst of the Puritan peculiarities; and yet they were sufficient to make her feel very lonely and strange.

The first subject of conversation was the present state of the colony—Lois soon found out that, although at the beginning she was not a little perplexed by the frequent reference to names of places which she naturally associated with the old country. Widow Smith was speaking: "In county of Essex the folk are ordered to keep four scouts, or companies of minute-men; six persons in each company; to be on the look-out for the wild Indians, who are for ever stirring about in the woods, stealthy brutes as they are! I am sure, I got such a fright the first harvest-time after I came over to New England, I go on dreaming, now near twenty years after Lothrop's business, of painted Indians, with their shaven scalps and their war-streaks, lurking behind the trees, and coming nearer and nearer with their noiseless steps."

"Yes," broke in one of her daughters; "and, mother, don't you remember how Hannah Benson told us how her husband had cut down every tree near his house at Deerbrook, in order that no one might come near him, under cover; and how one evening she was a-sitting in the twilight, when all her family were gone to bed, and her husband gone off to Plymouth on business, and she saw a log of wood, just like a trunk of a felled tree, lying in the shadow, and thought nothing of it, till, on looking again a while after, she fancied it was come a bit nearer to the house; and how her heart turned sick with fright; and how she dared not stir at first, but shut her eyes while she counted a hundred, and looked again, and the shadow was deeper, but she could see that the log was nearer; so she ran in and bolted the door, and went up to where her eldest lad lay. It was Elijah, and he was but sixteen then; but he rose up at his mother's words, and took his father's long duck-gun down; and he tried the loading, and spoke for the first time to put up a prayer that God would give his aim good guidance, and

went to a window that gave a view upon the side where the log lay, and fired; and no one dared to look what came of it; but all the household read the Scriptures, and prayed the whole night long; till morning came and showed a long stream of blood lying on the grass close by the log—which the full sunlight showed to be no log at all, but just a Red Indian covered with bark, and painted most skilfully, with his war-knife by his side."

All were breathless with listening; though to most the story, or others like it, were familiar. Then another took up the tale of horror:—

"And the pirates have been down at Marblehead, since you were here, Captain Holdernesse. 'Twas only the last winter they landed—French Papist pirates; and the people kept close within their houses, for they knew not what would come of it; and they dragged folk ashore. There was one woman among those folk—prisoners from some vessel, doubtless—and the pirates took them by force to the inland marsh; and the Marblehead folk kept still and quiet, every gun loaded, and every ear on the watch, for who knew but what the wild sea-robbers might take a turn on land next; and, in the dead of the night, they heard a woman's loud and pitiful outcry from the marsh, 'Lord Jesu! have mercy on me! Save me from the power of man, O Lord Jesu!' And the blood of all who heard the cry ran cold with terror; till old Nance Hickson, who had been stone-deaf and bed-ridden for years, stood up in the midst of the folk all gathered together in her grandson's house, and said, that, as they, the dwellers in Marblehead, had not had brave hearts or faith enough to go and succour the helpless, that cry of a dying woman should be in their ears, and in their children's ears, till the end of the world. And Nance dropped down dead as soon as she had made an end of speaking, and the pirates set sail from Marblehead at morning dawn; but the folk there hear the cry still, shrill and pitiful, from the waste marshes, 'Lord Jesu! have mercy on me! Save me from the power of man, O Lord Jesu!'"

"And, by token," said Elder Hawkins's deep bass voice, speaking with the strong nasal twang of the Puritans (who, says Butler,

"Blasphemed custard through the nose")

"godly Mr. Noyes ordained a fast at Marblehead, and preached a soul-stirring discourse on the words, 'Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, my brethen, ye did it not unto me.' But it has been borne in upon me at times, whether the whole vision of the pirates and the cry of the woman was not a device of Satan's to sift the Marblehead folk, and see what fruit their doctrine bore, and so to condemn them in the sight of the Lord. If it were so, the enemy had a great triumph; for assuredly it was no part of Christian men to leave a helpless woman unaided in her sore distress."

"But, Elder," said Widow Smith, "it was no vision; they were real living men who went ashore, men who broke down branches and left their footmarks on the ground."

"As for that matter, Satan hath many powers, and, if it be the day when he is permitted to go about like a roaring lion, he will not stick at trifles, but make his work complete. I tell you, many men are spiritual enemies in visible forms, permitted to roam about the waste places of the earth. I myself believe that these Red Indians are indeed the evil creatures of whom we read in Holy Scripture; and there is no doubt that they are in league with those abominable Papists, the French people in Canada. I have heard tell, that the French pay the Indians so much gold for every dozen scalps of Englishmen's heads."

"Pretty cheerful talk this!" said Captain Holdernesse to Lois, perceiving her blanched cheek and terror-stricken mien. "Thou art thinking that thou hadst better have stayed at Barford, I'll answer for it, wench. But the devil is not so black as he is painted."

"Ho! there again!" said Elder Hawkins. "The devil is painted, it hath been said so from old times; and are not these Indians painted, even like unto their father?"

"But is it all true?" asked Lois, aside, of Captain Holdernesse, letting the Elder hold forth unheeded by her, though listened to with the utmost reverence by the two daughters of the house.

"My wench," said the old sailor, "thou hast come to a country where there are many perils, both from land and from sea. The Indians hate the white men. Whether other white men" (meaning the French away to the north) "have hounded-on the savages, or whether the English have taken their lands and hunting-grounds without due recompense, and so raised the cruel vengeance of the wild creatures—who knows? But it is true that it is not safe to go far into the woods, for fear of the lurking painted savages; nor has it been safe to build a dwelling far from a settlement; and it takes a brave heart to make a journey from one town to another; and folk do say the Indian creatures rise up out of the very ground to waylay the English! and then others affirm they are all in league with Satan to affright the Christians out of the heathen country, over which he has reigned so long. Then, again, the sea-shore is infested by pirates, the scum of all nations: they land, and plunder, and ravage, and burn, and destroy. Folk get affrighted of the real dangers, and in their fright imagine, perchance, dangers that are not. But who knows? Holy Scripture speaks of witches and wizards, and of the power of the Evil One in desert places; and, even in the old country, we have heard tell of those who have sold their souls for ever for the little power they get for a few years on earth."

By this time the whole table was silent, listening to the captain; it was just one of those chance silences that sometimes occur, without any apparent reason, and often without any apparent consequence. But all present had reason, before many months had passed over, to remember the words which Lois spoke in answer, although her voice was low, and she only thought, in the interest of the moment, of being heard by her old friend the captain.

"They are fearful creatures, the witches! and yet I am

sorry for the poor old women, whilst I dread them. We had one in Barford, when I was a little child. No one knew whence she came, but she settled herself down in a mud-hut by the common-side; and there she lived, she and her cat." (At the mention of the cat, Elder Hawkins shook his head long and gloomily.) "No one knew how she lived, if it were not on nettles and scraps of oatmeal and such-like food, given her more for fear than for pity. She went double, and always talking and muttering to herself. Folk said she snared birds and rabbits in the thicket that came down to her hovel. How it came to pass I cannot say, but many a one fell sick in the village, and much cattle died one spring, when I was near four years old. I never heard much about it, for my father said it was ill talking about such things; I only know I got a sick fright one afternoon, when the maid had gone out for milk and had taken me with her, and we were passing a meadow where the Avon, circling, makes a deep round pool, and there was a crowd of folk, all still—and a still, breathless crowd makes the heart beat worse than a shouting, noisy one. They were all gazing towards the water, and the maid held me up in her arms, to see the sight above the shoulders of the people; and I saw old Hannah in the water, her grey hair all streaming down her shoulders, and her face bloody and black with the stones and mud they had been throwing at her, and her cat tied round her neck. I hid my face, I know, as soon as I saw the fearsome sight, for her eyes met mine as they were glaring with fury—poor, helpless, baited creature!—and she caught the sight of me, and cried out, 'Parson's wench, parson's wench, yonder, in thy nurse's arms, thy dad hath never tried for to save me; and none shall save thee, when thou art brought up for a witch.' Oh! the words rang in my ears, when I was dropping asleep, for years after. I used to dream that I was in that pond; that all men hated me with their eyes because I was a witch: and, at times, her black cat used to seem living again, and say over those dreadful words."

Lois stopped: the two daughters looked at her excitement with a kind of shrinking surprise, for the tears were in her eyes. Elder Hawkins shook his head, and muttered texts from Scripture; but cheerful Widow Smith, not liking the gloomy turn of the conversation, tried to give it a lighter cast by saying, "And I don't doubt but what the parson's bonny lass has bewitched many a one since, with her dimples and her pleasant ways—eh, Captain Holdernesse? It's you must tell us tales of the young lass's doings in England."

"Ay, ay," said the captain; "there's one under her charms in Warwickshire who will never get the better of it, I'm thinking."

Elder Hawkins rose to speak; he stood leaning on his hands, which were placed on the table: "Brethren," said he, "I must upbraid you if ye speak lightly; charms and witchcraft are evil things; I trust this maiden hath had nothing to do with them, even in thought. But my mind misgives me at her story. The hellish witch might have power from Satan to infect her mind, she being yet a child, with the deadly sin. Instead of vain talking, I call upon you all to join with me in prayer for this stranger in our land, that her heart may be purged from all iniquity. Let us pray."

"Come, there's no harm in that," said the captain; "but, Elder Hawkins, when you are at work, just pray for us all; for I am afeard there be some of us need purging from iniquity a good deal more than Lois Barclay, and a prayer for a man never does mischief."

Captain Holdernesse had business in Boston which detained him there for a couple of days; and during that time Lois remained with the Widow Smith, seeing what was to be seen of the new land that contained her future home. The letter of her dying mother was sent off to Salem, meanwhile, by a lad going thither, in order to prepare her Uncle Ralph Hickson for his niece's coming, as soon as Captain Holdernesse could find leisure to take her; for he considered

her given into his own personal charge, until he could consign her to her uncle's care. When the time came for going to Salem, Lois felt very sad at leaving the kindly woman under whose roof she had been staying, and looked back as long as she could see anything of Widow Smith's dwelling. She was packed into a rough kind of country-cart, which just held her and Captain Holdernesse, beside the driver. There was a basket of provisions under their feet, and behind them hung a bag of provender for the horse; for it was a good day's journey to Salem, and the road was reputed so dangerous that it was ill tarrying a minute longer than necessary for refreshment. English roads were bad enough at that period, and for long after; but in America the way was simply the cleared ground of the forest—the stumps of the felled trees still remaining in the direct line, forming obstacles which it required the most careful driving to avoid; and in the hollows, where the ground was swampy, the pulpy nature of it was obviated by logs of wood laid across the boggy part. The deep green forest, tangled into heavy darkness even thus early in the year, came within a few yards of the road all the way, though efforts were regularly made by the inhabitants of the neighbouring settlements to keep a certain space clear on each side, for fear of the lurking Indians, who might otherwise come upon them unawares. The cries of strange birds, the unwonted colour of some of them, all suggested to the imaginative or unaccustomed traveller the idea of war-whoops and painted deadly enemies. But at last they drew near to Salem, which rivalled Boston in size in those days, and boasted the names of one or two streets, although to an English eye they looked rather more like irregularly built houses, clustered round the meeting-house, or rather one of the meeting-houses, for a second was in process of building. The whole place was surrounded with two circles of stockades; between the two were the gardens and grazing-ground for those who dreaded their cattle straying into the woods, and the consequent danger of reclaiming them.

The lad who drove them flogged his spent horse into a trot, as they went through Salem to Ralph Hickson's house. It was evening, the leisure-time for the inhabitants, and their children were at play before the houses. Lois was struck by the beauty of one wee, toddling child, and turned to look after it; it caught its little foot in a stump of wood, and fell with a cry that brought the mother out in affright. As she ran out, her eye caught Lois' anxious gaze, although the noise of the heavy wheels drowned the sound of her words of inquiry as to the nature of the hurt the child had received. Nor had Lois time to think long upon the matter; for, the instant after, the horse was pulled up at the door of a good, square, substantial wooden house, plastered over into a creamy white, perhaps as handsome a house as any in Salem; and there she was told by the driver that her uncle, Ralph Hickson, lived. In the flurry of the moment she did not notice, but Captain Holdernesse did, that no one came out at the unwonted sound of wheels, to receive and welcome her. She was lifted down by the old sailor, and led into a large room, almost like the hall of some English manor-house as to size. A tall, gaunt young man of three or four-and-twenty sat on a bench by one of the windows, reading a great folio by the fading light of day. He did not rise when they came in, but looked at them with surprise, no gleam of intelligence coming into his stern, dark face. There was no woman in the house-place. Captain Holdernesse paused a moment, and then said—

"Is this house Ralph Hickson's?"

"It is," said the young man, in a slow, deep voice. But he added no word further.

"This is his niece, Lois Barclay," said the captain, taking the girl's arm, and pushing her forwards. The young man looked at her steadily and gravely for a minute; then rose, and carefully marking the page in the folio, which hitherto had laid open upon his knee, said, still in the same heavy, indifferent manner, "I will call my mother; she will know."

He opened a door which looked into a warm bright kitchen, ruddy with the light of the fire, over which three women were apparently engaged in cooking something, while a fourth, an old Indian woman, of a greenish-brown colour, shrivelled-up and bent with apparent age, moved backwards and forwards, evidently fetching the others the articles they required.

"Mother!" said the young man; and, having arrested her attention, he pointed over his shoulder to the newly-arrived strangers and returned to the study of his book, from time to time, however, furtively examining Lois from beneath his dark shaggy eyebrows.

A tall, largely-made woman, past middle life, came in from the kitchen, and stood reconnoitring the strangers.

Captain Holdernesse spoke—

"This is Lois Barclay, master Ralph Hickson's niece."

"I know nothing of her," said the mistress of the house in a deep voice, almost as masculine as her son's.

"Master Hickson received his sister's letter, did he not? I sent it off myself by a lad named Elias Wellcome, who left Boston for this place yester morning."

"Ralph Hickson has received no such letter. He lies bedridden in the chamber beyond. Any letters for him must come through my hands; wherefore I can affirm with certainty that no such letter has been delivered here. His sister Barclay, she that was Henrietta Hickson, and whose husband took the oaths to Charles Stuart, and stuck by his living when all godly men left theirs"——

Lois, who had thought her heart was dead and cold, a minute before, at the ungracious reception she had met with, felt words come up into her mouth at the implied insult to her father, and spoke out, to her own and the captain's astonishment—

"They might be godly men who left their churches on that day of which you speak, madam; but they alone were not the godly men, and no one has a right to limit true godliness for mere opinion's sake."

"Well said, lass," spoke out the captain, looking round upon her with a kind of admiring wonder, and patting her on the back.

Lois and her aunt gazed into each other's eyes unflinchingly, for a minute or two of silence; but the girl felt her colour coming and going, while the elder woman's never varied; and the eyes of the young maiden were filling fast with tears, while those of Grace Hickson kept on their stare, dry and unwavering.

"Mother," said the young man, rising up with a quicker motion than any one had yet used in this house, "it is ill speaking of such matters when my cousin comes first among us. The Lord may give her grace hereafter; but she has travelled from Boston city to-day, and she and this seafaring man must need rest and food."

He did not attend to see the effect of his words, but sat down again, and seemed to be absorbed in his book in an instant. Perhaps he knew that his word was law with his grim mother; for he had hardly ceased speaking before she had pointed to a wooden settle; and, smoothing the lines on her countenance, she said—"What Manasseh says is true. Sit down here, while I bid Faith and Nattee get food ready; and meanwhile I will go tell my husband that one who calls herself his sister's child is come over to pay him a visit."

She went to the door leading into the kitchen, and gave some directions to the elder girl, whom Lois now knew to be the daughter of the house. Faith stood impassive, while her mother spoke, scarcely caring to look at the newly-arrived strangers. She was like her brother Manasseh in complexion, but had handsomer features, and large, mysterious-looking eyes, as Lois saw, when once she lifted them up, and took in, as it were, the aspect of the sea-captain and her cousin with one swift, searching look. About the stiff, tall, angular mother, and the scarce less pliant figure of the daughter, a girl of twelve years old, or thereabouts, played all manner of impish antics, unheeded by them, as if it were her accustomed habit to peep about, now under their arms, now at this side,

now at that, making grimaces all the while at Lois and Captain Holdernesse, who sat facing the door, weary, and somewhat disheartened by their reception. The captain pulled out tobacco, and began to chew it by way of consolation; but in a moment or two his usual elasticity of spirit came to his rescue, and he said in a low voice to Lois—

"That scoundrel Elias, I will give it him! If the letter had but been delivered, thou wouldst have had a different kind of welcome; but, as soon as I have had some victuals, I will go out and find the lad, and bring back the letter, and that will make all right, my wench. Nay, don't be downhearted, for I cannot stand women's tears. Thou'rt just worn-out with the shaking and the want of food."

Lois brushed away her tears, and, looking round to try and divert her thoughts by fixing them on present objects, she caught her cousin Manasseh's deep-set eyes furtively watching her. It was with no unfriendly gaze; yet it made Lois uncomfortable, particularly as he did not withdraw his looks, after he must have seen that she observed him. She was glad when her aunt called her into an inner room to see her uncle, and she escaped from the steady observance of her gloomy, silent cousin.

Ralph Hickson was much older than his wife, and his illness made him look older still. He had never had the force of character that Grace, his spouse, possessed; and age and sickness had now rendered him almost childish at times. But his nature was affectionate; and, stretching out his trembling arms from where he lay bed-ridden, he gave Lois an unhesitating welcome, never waiting for the confirmation of the missing letter before he acknowledged her to be his niece.

"Oh! 'tis kind in thee to come all across the sea to make acquaintance with thine uncle; kind in sister Barclay to spare thee!"

Lois had to tell him, there was no one living to miss her at home in England; that, in fact, she had no home in England, no father nor mother left upon earth; and that

she had been bidden by her mother's last words to seek him out and ask him for a home. Her words came up, half-choked from a heavy heart, and his dulled wits could not take in their meaning without several repetitions; and then he cried like a child, rather at his own loss of a sister whom he had not seen for more than twenty years, than at that of the orphan's, standing before him, trying hard not to cry, but to start bravely in this new strange home. What most of all helped Lois in her self-restraint was her aunt's unsympathetic look. Born and bred in New England, Grace Hickson had a kind of jealous dislike to her husband's English relations, which had increased since of late years his weakened mind yearned after them; and he forgot the good reason he had had for his self-exile, and moaned over the decision which had led to it as the great mistake of his life. "Come," said she; "it strikes me that, in all this sorrow for the loss of one who died full of years, ye are forgetting in Whose hands life and death are!"

True words, but ill-spoken at that time. Lois looked up at her with a scarcely disguised indignation; which increased as she heard the contemptuous tone in which her aunt went on talking to Ralph Hickson, even while she was arranging his bed with a regard to his greater comfort.

"One would think thou wert a godless man, by the moan thou art always making over spilt milk; and truth is, thou art but childish in thine old age. When we were wed, thou left all things to the Lord; I would never have married thee else. Nay, lass," said she, catching the expression on Lois's face, "thou art never going to browbeat me with thine angry looks. I do my duty as I read it, and there is never a man in Salem that dare speak a word to Grace Hickson about either her works or her faith. Godly Mr. Cotton Mather hath said, that even he might learn of me; and I would advise thee rather to humble thyself, and see if the Lord may not convert thee from thy ways, since He has sent thee to dwell, as it were, in Zion, where the precious dew falls daily on Aaron's beard."

Lois felt ashamed and sorry to find that her aunt had so truly interpreted the momentary expression of her features; she blamed herself a little for the feeling that had caused that expression, trying to think how much her aunt might have been troubled with something, before the unexpected irruption of the strangers, and again hoping that the remembrance of this misunderstanding would soon pass away. So she endeavoured to reassure herself, and not to give way to her uncle's tender trembling pressure of her hand, as, at her aunt's bidding, she wished him "good-night," and returned into the outer, or "keeping"-room, where all the family were now assembled, ready for the meal of flour-cakes and venison-steaks which Nattee, the Indian servant, was bringing in from the kitchen. No one seemed to have been speaking to Captain Holdernesse, while Lois had been away. Manasseh sat quiet and silent where he did, with the book open upon his knee; his eyes thoughtfully fixed on vacancy, as if he saw a vision, or dreamed dreams. Faith stood by the table, lazily directing Nattee in her preparations; and Prudence lolled against the door-frame, between kitchen and keeping-room, playing tricks on the old Indian woman, as she passed backwards and forwards, till Nattee appeared to be in a state of strong irritation, which she tried in vain to suppress; as, whenever she showed any sign of it, Prudence only seemed excited to greater mischief. When all was ready, Manasseh lifted his right hand and "asked a blessing," as it was termed; but the grace became a long prayer for abstract spiritual blessings, for strength to combat Satan, and to quench his fiery darts, and at length assumed—so Lois thought—a purely personal character, as if the young man had forgotten the occasion, and even the people present, but was searching into the nature of the diseases that beset his own sick soul, and spreading them out before the Lord. He was brought back by a pluck at the coat from Prudence; he opened his shut eyes, cast an angry glance at the child, who made a face at him for sole reply, and then he sat down, and they

all fell to. Grace Hickson would have thought her hospitality sadly at fault, if she had allowed Captain Holdernesse to go out in search of a bed. Skins were spread for him on the floor of the keeping-room; a Bible and a square bottle of spirits were placed on the table to supply his wants during the night; and, in spite of all the cares and troubles, temptations, or sins of the members of that household, they were all asleep before the town clock struck ten.

In the morning, the captain's first care was to go out in search of the boy Elias and the missing letter. He met him bringing it with an easy conscience, for, thought Elias, a few hours sooner or later will make no difference; to-night or the morrow morning will be all the same. But he was startled into a sense of wrong-doing, by a sound box on the ear from the very man who had charged him to deliver it speedily, and whom he believed to be at that very moment in Boston city.

The letter delivered, all possible proof being given that Lois had a right to claim a home from her nearest relations, Captain Holdernesse thought it best to take leave.

"Thou'lt take to them, lass, maybe, when there is no one here to make thee think on the old country. Nay, nay! parting is hard work at all times, and best get hard work done out of hand! Keep up thine heart, my wench, and I'll come back and see thee next spring, if we are all spared till then; and who knows what fine young miller mayn't come with me? Don't go and get wed to a praying Puritan, meanwhile! There, there; I'm off. God bless thee!"

And Lois was left alone in New England.

CHAPTER II

It was hard up-hill work for Lois to win herself a place in this family. Her aunt was a woman of narrow, strong affections. Her love for her husband, if ever she had any,

was burnt out and dead long ago. What she did for him, she did from duty; but duty was not strong enough to restrain that little member, the tongue; and Lois's heart often bled at the continual flow of contemptuous reproof which Grace constantly addressed to her husband, even while she was sparing no pains or trouble to minister to his bodily ease and comfort. It was more as a relief to herself that she spoke in this way, than with any desire that her speeches should affect him; and he was too deadened by illness to feel hurt by them; or, it may be, the constant repetition of her sarcasms had made him indifferent; at any rate, so that he had his food and his state of bodily warmth attended to, he very seldom seemed to care much for anything else. Even his first flow of affection towards Lois was soon exhausted; he cared for her, because she arranged his pillows well and skilfully, and because she could prepare new and dainty kinds of food for his sick appetite, but no longer for her as his dead sister's child. Still he did care for her, and Lois was too glad of his little hoard of affection to examine how or why it was given. To him she could give pleasure, but apparently to no one else in that household. Her aunt looked askance at her for many reasons: the first coming of Lois to Salem was inopportune; the expression of disapprobation on her face on that evening still lingered and rankled in Grace's memory; early prejudices, and feelings, and prepossessions of the English girl were all on the side of what would now be called Church and State, what was then esteemed in that country a superstitious observance of the directions of a Popish rubric, and a servile regard for the family of an oppressing and irreligious king. Nor is it to be supposed that Lois did not feel, and feel acutely, the want of sympathy that all those with whom she was now living manifested towards the old hereditary loyalty (religious as well as political loyalty) in which she had been brought up. With her aunt and Manasseh it was more than want of sympathy; it was positive, active antipathy to all the ideas Lois held

most dear. The very allusion, however incidentally made, to the little old grey church at Barford, where her father had preached so long—the occasional reference to the troubles in which her own country had been distracted when she left—and the adherence, in which she had been brought up, to the notion that the king could do no wrong, seemed to irritate Manasseh past endurance. He would get up from his reading, his constant employment when at home, and walk angrily about the room after Lois had said anything of this kind, muttering to himself; and once he had even stopped before her, and in a passionate tone bade her not talk so like a fool. Now this was very different to his mother's sarcastic, contemptuous way of treating all poor Lois's little loyal speeches. Grace would lead her on—at least she did at first, till experience made Lois wiser—to express her thoughts on such subjects, till, just when the girl's heart was opening, her aunt would turn round upon her with some bitter sneer that roused all the evil feelings in Lois's disposition by its sting. Now Manasseh seemed, through all his anger, to be so really grieved by what he considered her error, that he went much nearer to convincing her that there might be two sides to a question. Only this was a view that it appeared like treachery to her dead father's memory to entertain.

Somehow, Lois felt instinctively that Manasseh was really friendly towards her. He was little in the house; there was farming, and some kind of mercantile business to be transacted by him, as real head of the house; and, as the season drew on, he went shooting and hunting in the surrounding forests, with a daring which caused his mother to warn and reprove him in private, although to the neighbours she boasted largely of her son's courage and disregard of danger. Lois did not often walk out for the mere sake of walking; there was generally some household errand to be transacted when any of the women of the family went abroad; but once or twice she had caught glimpses of the dreary, dark wood, hemming in the cleared land on all sides—the great wood with its perpetual movement of branch and

bough, and its solemn wail, that came into the very streets of Salem when certain winds blew, bearing the sound of the pine-trees clear upon the ears that had leisure to listen. And, from all accounts, this old forest, girdling round the settlement, was full of dreaded and mysterious beasts, and still more to be dreaded Indians, stealing in and out among the shadows, intent on bloody schemes against the Christian people: panther-streaked, shaven Indians, in league by their own confession, as well as by the popular belief, with evil powers.

Nattee, the old Indian servant, would occasionally make Lois's blood run cold, as she and Faith and Prudence listened to the wild stories she told them of the wizards of her race. It was often in the kitchen, in the darkening evening, while some cooking process was going on, that the old Indian crone, sitting on her haunches by the bright red wood embers which sent up no flame, but a lurid light reversing the shadows of all the faces around, told her weird stories, while they were awaiting the rising of the dough, perchance, out of which the household bread had to be made. There ran through these stories always a ghastly, unexpressed suggestion of some human sacrifice being needed to complete the success of any incantation to the Evil One; and the poor old creature, herself believing and shuddering as she narrated her tale in broken English, took a strange, unconscious pleasure in her power over her hearers—young girls of the oppressing race, which had brought her down into a state little differing from slavery, and reduced her people to outcasts on the hunting-grounds which had belonged to her fathers.

After such tales, it required no small effort on Lois's part to go out, at her aunt's command, into the common pasture round the town, and bring the cattle home at night. Who knew but what the double-headed snake might start up from each blackberry-bush—that wicked, cunning, accursed creature in the service of the Indian wizards, that had such power over all those white maidens who met the eyes placed at either end of his long, sinuous, creeping body, so that, loathe

him, loathe the Indian race as they would, off they must go into the forest to seek out some Indian man, and must beg to be taken into his wigwam, adjuring faith and race for ever? Or there were spells—so Nattee said—hidden about the ground by the wizards, which changed that person's nature who found them; so that, gentle and loving as they might have been before, thereafter they took no pleasure but in the cruel torments of others, and had a strange power given to them of causing such torments at their will. Once, Nattee, speaking low to Lois, who was alone with her in the kitchen, whispered out her terrified belief that such a spell had Prudence found; and, when the Indian showed her arms to Lois, all pinched black and blue by the impish child, the English girl began to be afraid of her cousin as of one possessed. But it was not Nattee alone, nor young imaginative girls alone, that believed in these stories. We can afford to smile at them now; but our English ancestors entertained superstitions of much the same character at the same period, and with less excuse, as the circumstances surrounding them were better known, and consequently more explicable by common sense, than the real mysteries of the deep, untrodden forests of New England. The gravest divines not only believed stories similar to that of the double-headed serpent, and other tales of witchcraft, but they made such narrations the subjects of preaching and prayer; and, as cowardice makes us all cruel, men who were blameless in many of the relations of life, and even praiseworthy in some, became, from superstition, cruel persecutors about this time, showing no mercy towards any one whom they believed to be in league with the Evil One.

Faith was the person with whom the English girl was the most intimately associated in her uncle's house. The two were about the same age, and certain household-employments were shared between them. They took it in turns to call in the cows, to make up the butter which had been churned by Hosea, a stiff, old out-door servant, in whom Grace Hickson placed great confidence; and each lassie had

her great spinning-wheel for wool, and her lesser for flax, before a month had elapsed after Lois's coming. Faith was a grave, silent person, never merry, sometimes very sad, though Lois was a long time in even guessing why. She would try, in her sweet, simple fashion, to cheer her cousin up, when the latter was depressed, by telling her old stories of English ways and life. Occasionally, Faith seemed to care to listen; occasionally, she did not heed one word, but dreamed on. Whether of the past or of the future, who could tell?

Stern old ministers came in to pay their pastoral visits. On such occasions, Grace Hickson would put on clean apron and clean cap, and make them more welcome than she was ever seen to do any one else, bringing out the best provisions of her store, and setting of all before them. Also, the great Bible was brought forth, and Hosea and Nattee summoned from their work, to listen while the minister read a chapter, and, as he read, expounded it at considerable length. After this all knelt, while he, standing, lifted up his right hand, and prayed for all possible combinations of Christian men, for all possible cases of spiritual need; and lastly, taking the individuals before him, he would put up a very personal supplication for each, according to his notion of their wants. At first, Lois wondered at the aptitude of one or two of his prayers of this description to the outward circumstances of each case; but, when she perceived that her aunt had usually a pretty long confidential conversation with the minister in the early part of his visit, she became aware that he received both his impressions and his knowledge through the medium of "that godly woman, Grace Hickson;" and I am afraid she paid less regard to the prayer "for the maiden from another land, who hath brought the errors of that land as a seed with her, even across the great ocean, and who is letting even now the little seeds shoot up into an evil tree, in which all unclean creatures may find shelter."

"I like the prayers of our Church better," said Lois one day to Faith. "No clergyman in England can pray his own

words; and therefore it is that he does not judge of others so as to fit his prayers to what he esteems to be their case, as Mr. Tappau did this morning."

"I hate Mr. Tappau!" said Faith shortly, a passionate flash of light coming out of her dark, heavy eyes.

"Why so, cousin? It seems to me as if he were a good man, although I like not his prayers."

Faith only repeated her words, "I hate him!"

Lois was sorry for this strong, bad feeling; instinctively sorry, for she was loving herself, delighted in being loved, and felt a jar run through her at every sign of want of love in others. But she did not know what to say, and was silent at the time. Faith, too, went on turning her wheel with vehemence, but spoke never a word until her thread snapped; and then she pushed the wheel away hastily, and left the room.

Then Prudence crept softly up to Lois's side. This strange child seemed to be tossed about by varying moods: to-day she was caressing and communicative; to-morrow she might be deceitful, mocking, and so indifferent to the pain or sorrows of others that you could call her almost inhuman.

"So thou dost not like Pastor Tappau's prayers?" she whispered.

Lois was sorry to have been overheard; but she neither would nor could take back her words.

"I like them not so well as the prayers I used to hear at home."

"Mother says thy home was with the ungodly. Nay, don't look at me so—it was not I that said it. I'm none so fond of praying myself, nor of Pastor Tappau, for that matter. But Faith cannot abide him, and I know why. Shall I tell thee, Cousin Lois?"

"No! Faith did not tell me; and she was the right person to give her own reasons."

"Ask her where young Mr. Nolan is gone to, and thou wilt hear. I have seen Faith cry by the hour together about Mr. Nolan."

"Hush, child! hush!" said Lois, for she heard Faith's approaching step, and feared lest she should overhear what they were saying.

The truth was that, a year or two before, there had been a great struggle in Salem village, a great division in the religious body, and Pastor Tappau had been the leader of the more violent, and, ultimately, the successful party. In consequence of this, the less popular minister, Mr. Nolan, had had to leave the place. And him Faith Hickson loved with all the strength of her passionate heart, although he never was aware of the attachment he had excited, and her own family were too regardless of manifestations of mere feeling ever to observe the signs of any emotion on her part. But the old Indian servant Nattee saw and observed them all. She knew, as well as if she had been told the reason, why Faith had lost all care about father or mother, brother and sister, about household work and daily occupation; nay, about the observances of religion as well. Nattee read the meaning of the deep smouldering of Faith's dislike to Pastor Tappau aright; the Indian woman understood why the girl (whom alone of all the white people she loved) avoided the old minister—would hide in the wood-stack, sooner than be called in to listen to his exhortations and prayers. With savage, untutored people, it is not "Love me, love my dog,"—they are often jealous of the creature beloved; but it is, "Whom thou hatest I will hate;" and Nattee's feeling towards Pastor Tappau was even an exaggeration of the mute, unspoken hatred of Faith.

For a long time, the cause of her cousin's dislike and avoidance of the minister was a mystery to Lois; but the name of Nolan remained in her memory, whether she would or no; and it was more from girlish interest in a suspected love affair, than from any indifferent and heartless curiosity, that she could not help piecing together little speeches and actions with Faith's interest in the absent banished minister, for an explanatory clue, till not a doubt remained in her mind. And this without any further communication with Prudence;

for Lois declined hearing any more on the subject from her, and so gave deep offence.

Faith grew sadder and duller, as the autumn drew on. She lost her appetite; her brown complexion became sallow and colourless; her dark eyes looked hollow and wild. The first of November was near at hand. Lois, in her instinctive, well-intentioned efforts to bring some life and cheerfulness into the monotonous household, had been telling Faith of many English customs, silly enough, no doubt, and which scarcely lighted up a flicker of interest in the American girl's mind. The cousins were lying awake in their bed, in the great unplastered room, which was in part store-room, in part bed-room. Lois was full of sympathy for Faith that night. For long she had listened to her cousin's heavy, irrepressible sighs, in silence. Faith sighed, because her grief was of too old a date for violent emotion or crying. Lois listened without speaking in the dark, quiet night hours, for a long, long time. She kept quite still, because she thought such vent for sorrow might relieve her cousin's weary heart. But, when at length, instead of lying motionless, Faith seemed to be growing restless, even to convulsive motions of her limbs, Lois began to speak, to talk about England, and the dear old ways at home, without exciting much attention on Faith's part; until at length she fell upon the subject of Hallow-e'en, and told about customs then and long afterwards practised in England, and that have scarcely yet died out in Scotland. As she told of tricks she had often played, of the apple eaten facing a mirror, of the dripping sheet, of the basins of water, of the nuts burning side by side, and many other such innocent ways of divination, by which laughing, trembling English maidens sought to see the form of their future husbands, if husbands they were to have: then Faith listened breathlessly, asking short eager questions, as if some ray of hope had entered into her gloomy heart. Lois went on speaking, telling her of all the stories that would confirm the truth of the second sight vouchsafed to all seekers in the accustomed methods; half-

believing, half-incredulous herself, but desiring, above all things, to cheer up poor Faith.

Suddenly, Prudence rose up from her truckle-bed in the dim corner of the room. They had not thought that she was awake; but she had been listening long.

"Cousin Lois may go out and meet Satan by the brook-side, if she will; but, if thou goest, Faith, I will tell mother —ay, and I will tell Pastor Tappau, too. Hold thy stories, Cousin Lois; I am afeared of my very life. I would rather never be wed at all, than feel the touch of the creature that would take the apple out of my hand, as I held it over my left shoulder." The excited girl gave a loud scream of terror at the image her fancy had conjured up. Faith and Lois sprang out towards her, flying across the moon-lit room in their white night-gowns. At the same instant, summoned by the same cry, Grace Hickson came to her child.

"Hush! hush!" said Faith, authoritatively.

"What is it, my wench?" asked Grace. While Lois, feeling as if she had done all the mischief, kept silence.

"Take her away, take her away!" screamed Prudence. "Look over her shoulder—her left shoulder—the Evil One is there now, I see him stretching over for the half-bitten apple."

"What is it she says?" said Grace austerely.

"She is dreaming," said Faith; "Prudence, hold thy tongue." And she pinched the child severely, while Lois more tenderly tried to soothe the alarms she felt that she had conjured up.

"Be quiet, Prudence," said she, "and go to sleep! I will stay by thee, till thou hast gone off into slumber."

"No, no! go away!" sobbed Prudence, who was really terrified at first, but was now assuming more alarm than she felt, from the pleasure she received at perceiving herself the centre of attention. "Faith shall stay by me, not you, wicked English witch!"

So Faith sat by her sister; and Grace, displeased and perplexed, withdrew to her own bed, purposing to inquire

more into the matter in the morning. Lois only hoped it might all be forgotten by that time, and resolved never to talk again of such things. But an event happened in the remaining hours of the night to change the current of affairs. While Grace had been absent from her room, her husband had had another paralytic stroke: whether he, too, had been alarmed by that eldritch scream no one could ever know. By the faint light of the rush-candle burning at the bed-side, his wife perceived that a great change had taken place in his aspect on her return: the irregular breathing came almost like snorts—the end was drawing near. The family were roused, and all help given that either the doctor or experience could suggest. But before the late November morning-light, all was ended for Ralph Hickson.

The whole of the ensuing day, they sat or moved in darkened rooms, and spoke few words, and those below their breath. Manasseh kept at home, regretting his father, no doubt, but showing little emotion. Faith was the child that bewailed her loss most grievously; she had a warm heart, hidden away somewhere under her moody exterior, and her father had shown her far more passive kindness than ever her mother had done; for Grace made distinct favourites of Manasseh, her only son, and Prudence, her youngest child. Lois was about as unhappy as any of them; for she had felt strongly drawn towards her uncle as her kindest friend, and the sense of his loss renewed the old sorrow she had experienced at her own parent's death. But she had no time and no place to cry in. On her devolved many of the cares which it would have seemed indecorous in the nearer relatives to interest themselves in enough to take an active part: the change required in their dress, the household preparations for the sad feast of the funeral—Lois had to arrange all under her aunt's stern direction.

But, a day or two afterwards—the last day before the funeral—she went into the yard to fetch in some faggots for the oven; it was a solemn, beautiful, starlit evening, and some sudden sense of desolation in the midst of the vast

universe thus revealed touched Lois's heart, and she sat down behind the wood-stack, and cried very plentiful tears.

She was startled by Manasseh, who suddenly turned the corner of the stack, and stood before her.

"Lois crying!"

"Only a little," she said, rising up, and gathering her bundle of faggots; for she dreaded being questioned by her grim, impassive cousin. To her surprise, he laid his hand on her arm, and said—

"Stop one minute. Why art thou crying, cousin?"

"I don't know," she said, just like a child questioned in like manner; and she was again on the point of weeping.

"My father was very kind to thee, Lois; I do not wonder that thou grievest after him. But the Lord who taketh away can restore tenfold. I will be as kind as my father—yea, kinder. This is not a time to talk of marriage and giving in marriage. But after we have buried our dead, I wish to speak to thee."

Lois did not cry now; but she shrank with affright. What did her cousin mean? She would far rather that he had been angry with her for unreasonable grieving, for folly.

She avoided him carefully—as carefully as she could, without seeming to dread him—for the next few days. Sometimes, she thought it must have been a bad dream; for, if there had been no English lover in the case, no other man in the whole world, she could never have thought of Manasseh as her husband; indeed, till now, there had been nothing in his words or actions to suggest such an idea. Now it had been suggested, there was no telling how much she loathed him. He might be good, and pious—he doubtless was—but his dark, fixed eyes, moving so slowly and heavily, his lank, black hair, his grey, coarse skin, all made her dislike him now—all his personal ugliness and ungainliness struck on her senses with a jar, since those few words spoken behind the hay-stack.

She knew that, sooner or later, the time must come for further discussion of this subject; but, like a coward, she

tried to put it off by clinging to her aunt's apron-string, for she was sure that Grace Hickson had far different views for her only son. As, indeed, she had; for she was an ambitious, as well as a religious, woman; and, by an early purchase of land in Salem village, the Hicksons had become wealthy people, without any great exertions of their own—partly, also, by the silent process of accumulation; for they had never cared to change their manner of living, from the time when it had been suitable to a far smaller income than that which they at present enjoyed. So much for worldly circumstances. As for their worldly character, it stood as high. No one could say a word against any of their habits or actions. Their righteousness and godliness were patent to every one's eyes. So Grace Hickson thought herself entitled to pick and choose among the maidens, before she should meet with one fitted to be Manasseh's wife. None in Salem came up to her imaginary standard. She had it in her mind even at this very time, so soon after her husband's death, to go to Boston, and take counsel with the leading ministers there, with worthy Mr. Cotton Mather at their head, and see if they could tell her of a well-favoured and godly young maiden in their congregations worthy of being the wife of her son. But, besides good looks and godliness, the wench must have good birth and good wealth, or Grace Hickson would have put her contemptuously on one side. When once this paragon was found, and the ministers had approved, Grace anticipated no difficulty on her son's part. So Lois was right in feeling that her aunt would dislike any speech of marriage between Manasseh and herself.

But the girl was brought to bay one day, in this wise. Manasseh had ridden forth on some business, which every one said would occupy him the whole day; but, meeting the man with whom he had to transact his affairs, he returned earlier than any one expected. He missed Lois from the keeping-room, where his sisters were spinning, almost immediately. His mother sat by at her knitting; he could see

Nattee in the kitchen through the open door. He was too reserved to ask where Lois was; but he quietly sought till he found her, in the great loft, already piled with winter stores of fruit and vegetables. Her aunt had sent her there to examine the apples one by one, and pick out such as were unsound for immediate use. She was stooping down, and intent upon this work, and was hardly aware of his approach, until she lifted up her head and saw him standing close before her. She dropped the apple she was holding, went a little paler than her wont, and faced him in silence.

"Lois," he said, "thou rememberest the words that I spoke while we yet mourned over my father. I think that I am called to marriage now, as the head of this household. And I have seen no maiden so pleasant in my sight as thou art, Lois!" He tried to take her hand. But she put it behind her with a childish shake of her head, and, half-crying, said—

"Please, Cousin Manasseh, do not say this to me! I dare say you ought to be married, being the head of the household now; but I don't want to be married. I would rather not."

"That is well spoken," replied he; frowning a little, nevertheless. "I should not like to take to wife an over-forward maiden, ready to jump at wedlock. Besides, the congregation might talk, if we were to be married too soon after my father's death. We have, perchance, said enough, even now. But I wished thee to have thy mind set at ease as to thy future well-doing. Thou wilt have leisure to think of it, and to bring thy mind more fully round to it." Again he held out his hand. This time she took hold of it with a free, frank gesture.

"I owe you somewhat for your kindness to me ever since I came, Cousin Manasseh; and I have no way of paying you but by telling you truly I can love you as a dear friend, if you will let me, but never as a wife."

He flung her hand away, but did not take his eyes off her face, though his glance was lowering and gloomy. He

muttered something which she did not quite hear; and so she went on bravely, although she kept trembling a little, and had much ado to keep from crying.

"Please, let me tell you all! There was a young man in Barford—nay, Manasseh, I cannot speak if you are so angry; it is hard work to tell you anyhow—he said that he wanted to marry me; but I was poor, and his father would have none of it; and I do not want to marry any one; but, if I did, it would be"—— Her voice dropped, and her blushes told the rest. Manasseh stood looking at her with sullen, hollow eyes, that had a gathering touch of wildness in them; and then he said—

"It is borne in upon me—verily, I see it as in a vision—that thou must be my spouse, and no other man's. Thou canst not escape what is fore-doomed. Months ago, when I set myself to read the old godly books in which my soul used to delight until thy coming; I saw no letter of printer's ink marked on the page, but I saw a gold and ruddy type of some unknown language, the meaning whereof was whispered into my soul; it was, 'Marry Lois! marry Lois!' And, when my father died, I knew it was the beginning of the end. It is the Lord's will, Lois, and thou canst not escape from it." And again he would have taken her hand, and drawn her towards him. But this time she eluded him with ready movement.

"I do not acknowledge it to be the Lord's will, Manasseh," said she. "It is not 'borne in upon me,' as you Puritans call it, that I am to be your wife. I am none so set upon wedlock as to take you, even though there be no other chance for me. For I do not care for you as I ought to care for my husband. But I could have cared for you very much as a cousin—as a kind cousin."

She stopped speaking; she could not choose the right words with which to speak to him of her gratitude and friendliness, which yet could never be any feeling nearer and dearer, no more than two parallel lines can ever meet.

But he was so convinced by what he considered the spirit

of prophecy, that Lois was to be his wife, that he felt rather more indignant at what he considered to be her resistance to the pre-ordained decree, than really anxious as to the result. Again he tried to convince her that neither he nor she had any choice in the matter, by saying—

"The voice said unto me 'Marry Lois;' and I said, 'I will, Lord.'"

"But," Lois replied, "the voice, as you call it, has never spoken such a word to me."

"Lois," he answered solemnly, "it will speak. And then wilt thou obey, even as Samuel did?"

"No; indeed I cannot!" she answered briskly. "I may take a dream to be the truth, and hear my own fancies, if I think about them too long. But I cannot marry any one from obedience."

"Lois, Lois, thou art as yet unregenerate; but I have seen thee in a vision as one of the elect, robed in white. As yet thy faith is too weak for thee to obey meekly; but it shall not always be so. I will pray that thou mayest see thy preordained course. Meanwhile, I will smooth away all worldly obstacles."

"Cousin Manasseh! Cousin Manasseh!" cried Lois after him, as he was leaving the room, "come back! I cannot put it in strong enough words. Manasseh, there is no power in heaven or earth that can make me love thee enough to marry thee, or to wed thee without such love. And this I say solemnly, because it is better that this should end at once."

For a moment he was staggered; then he lifted up his hands, and said—

"God forgive thee thy blasphemy! Remember Hazael, who said, 'Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?' and went straight and did it, because his evil courses were fixed and appointed for him from before the foundation of the world. And shall not thy paths be laid out among the godly, as it hath been foretold to me?"

He went away; and for a minute or two Lois felt as if

his words must come true, and that, struggle as she would, hate her doom as she would, she must become his wife; and, under the circumstances, many a girl would have succumbed to her apparent fate. Isolated from all previous connections, hearing no word from England, living in the heavy, monotonous routine of a family with one man for head, and this man esteemed a hero by most of those around him, simply because he was the only man in the family—these facts alone would have formed strong presumptions that most girls would have yielded to the offers of such a one. But, besides this, there was much to tell upon the imagination in those days, in that place and time. It was prevalently believed that there were manifestations of spiritual influence—of the direct influence both of good and bad spirits—constantly to be perceived in the course of men's lives. Lots were drawn, as guidance from the Lord; the Bible was opened, and the leaves allowed to fall apart; and the first text the eye fell upon was supposed to be appointed from above as a direction. Sounds were heard that could not be accounted for; they were made by the evil spirits not yet banished from the desert-places of which they had so long held possession. Sights, inexplicable and mysterious, were dimly seen—Satan, in some shape, seeking whom he might devour. And, at the beginning of the long winter season, such whispered tales, such old temptations and hauntings, and devilish terrors, were supposed to be peculiarly rife. Salem was, as it were, snowed up, and left to prey upon itself. The long, dark evenings; the dimly-lighted rooms; the creaking passages, where heterogeneous articles were piled away, out of the reach of the keen-piercing frost, and where occasionally, in the dead of night, a sound was heard, as of some heavy falling body, when, next morning, everything appeared to be in its right place (so accustomed are we to measure noises by comparison with themselves, and not with the absolute stillness of the night-season); the white mist, coming nearer and nearer to the windows every evening in strange shapes, like phantoms—

all these, and many other circumstances : such as the distant fall of mighty trees in the mysterious forests girdling them round; the faint whoop and cry of some Indian seeking his camp, and unwittingly nearer to the white men's settlement than either he or they would have liked, could they have chosen; the hungry yells of the wild beasts approaching the cattle-pens—these were the things which made that winter life in Salem, in the memorable time of 1691–2, seem strange, and haunted, and terrific to many; peculiarly weird and awful to the English girl, in her first year's sojourn in America.

And now, imagine Lois worked upon perpetually by Manasseh's conviction that it was decreed that she should be his wife, and you will see that she was not without courage and spirit to resist as she did, steadily, firmly, and yet sweetly. Take one instance out of many, when her nerves were subjected to a shock—slight in relation, it is true; but then remember that she had been all day, and for many days, shut up within doors, in a dull light that at mid-day was almost dark with a long-continued snowstorm. Evening was coming on, and the wood fire was more cheerful than any of the human beings surrounding it; the monotonous whirr of the smaller spinning-wheels had been going on all day, and the store of flax downstairs was nearly exhausted: when Grace Hickson bade Lois fetch down some more from the store-room, before the light so entirely waned away that it could not be found without a candle, and a candle it would be dangerous to carry into that apartment full of combustible materials, especially at this time of hard frost, when every drop of water was locked up and bound in icy hardness. So Lois went, half-shrinking from the long passage that led to the stairs leading up into the store-room; for it was in this passage that the strange night-sounds were heard, which every one had begun to notice, and speak about in lowered tones. She sang, however, as she went, "to keep her courage up," in a subdued voice, the evening hymn she had so often sung in Barford church—

"Glory to Thee, my God, this night;"

and so it was, I suppose, that she never heard the breathing or motion of any creature near her, till, just as she was loading herself with flax to carry down, she heard some one —it was Manasseh—say close to her ear :

"Has the voice spoken yet? Speak, Lois! Has the voice spoken yet to thee—that speaketh to me day and night, 'Marry Lois'?"

She started and turned a little sick, but spoke almost directly in a brave, clear manner—

"No, Cousin Manasseh! And it never will."

"Then I must wait yet longer," he replied hoarsely, as if to himself. "But all submission—all submission."

At last, a break came upon the monotony of the long, dark winter. The parishioners once more raised the discussion whether—the parish extending as it did—it was not absolutely necessary for Pastor Tappau to have help. This question had been mooted once before; and then Pastor Tappau had acquiesced in the necessity, and all had gone on smoothly for some months after the appointment of his assistant; until a feeling had sprung up on the part of the elder minister, which might have been called jealousy of the younger, if so godly a man as Pastor Tappau could have been supposed to entertain so evil a passion. However that might be, two parties were speedily formed; the younger and more ardent being in favour of Mr. Nolan, the elder and more persistent—and, at the time, the more numerous—clinging to the old, grey-headed, dogmatic Mr. Tappau, who had married them, baptized their children, and was to them, literally, as a "pillar of the church." So Mr. Nolan left Salem, carrying away with him, possibly, more hearts than that of Faith Hickson's; but certainly she had never been the same creature since.

But now—Christmas, 1691—one or two of the older members of the congregation being dead, and some who were younger men having come to settle in Salem—Mr.

Tappau being also older, and, some charitably supposed, wiser—a fresh effort had been made, and Mr. Nolan was returning to labour in ground apparently smoothed over. Lois had taken a keen interest in all the proceedings for Faith's sake—far more than the latter did for herself, any spectator would have said. Faith's wheel never went faster or slower, her thread never broke, her colour never came, her eyes were never uplifted with sudden interest, all the time these discussions respecting Mr. Nolan's return were going on. But Lois, after the hint given by Prudence, had found a clue to many a sigh and look of despairing sorrow, even without the help of Nattee's improvised songs, in which, under strange allegories, the helpless love of her favourite was told to ears heedless of all meaning, except those of the tender-hearted and sympathetic Lois. Occasionally, she heard a strange chant of the old Indian woman's—half in her own language, half in broken English—droned over some simmering pipkin, from which the smell was, to say the least, unearthly. Once, on perceiving this odour in the keeping-room, Grace Hickson suddenly exclaimed—

"Nattee is at her heathen ways again; we shall have some mischief unless she is stayed."

But Faith, moving quicker than ordinary, said something about putting a stop to it, and so forestalled her mother's evident intention of going into the kitchen. Faith shut the door between the two rooms, and entered upon some remonstrance with Nattee; but no one could hear the words used. Faith and Nattee seemed more bound together by love and common interest than any other two among the self-contained individuals comprising this household. Lois sometimes felt as if her presence, as a third, interrupted some confidential talk between her cousin and the old servant. And yet she was fond of Faith, and could almost think that Faith liked her more than she did either mother, brother, or sister; for the first two were indifferent as to any unspoken feelings, while Prudence delighted in discovering them, only to make an amusement to herself out of them.

One day, Lois was sitting by herself at her sewing-table, while Faith and Nattee were holding one of their secret conclaves, from which Lois felt herself to be tacitly excluded: when the outer door opened, and a tall, pale young man, in the strict professional habit of a minister, entered. Lois sprang up with a smile and a look of welcome for Faith's sake; for this must be the Mr. Nolan whose name had been on the tongue of every one for days, and who was, as Lois knew, expected to arrive the day before.

He seemed half-surprised at the glad alacrity with which he was received by this stranger: possibly, he had not heard of the English girl who was an inmate in the house where formerly he had seen only grave, solemn, rigid, or heavy faces, and had been received with a stiff form of welcome, very different from the blushing, smiling, dimpled looks that innocently met him with the greeting almost of an old acquaintance. Lois, having placed a chair for him, hastened out to call Faith, never doubting but that the feeling which her cousin entertained for the young pastor was mutual, although it might be unrecognised in its full depth by either.

"Faith!" said she, bright and breathless. "Guess—— No," checking herself to an assumed unconsciousness of any particular importance likely to be affixed to her words; "Mr. Nolan, the new pastor, is in the keeping-room. He has asked for my aunt and Manasseh. My aunt is gone to the prayer-meeting at Pastor Tappau's, and Manasseh is away." Lois went on speaking, to give Faith time; for the girl had become deadly white at the intelligence, while, at the same time, her eyes met the keen, cunning eyes of the old Indian with a peculiar look of half-wondering awe; while Nattee's looks expressed triumphant satisfaction.

"Go," said Lois, smoothing Faith's hair, and kissing the white, cold cheek, "or he will wonder why no one comes to see him, and perhaps think he is not welcome." Faith went without another word into the keeping-room, and shut the door of communication. Nattee and Lois were left together. Lois felt as happy as if some piece of good fortune had

befallen herself. For the time, her growing dread of Manasseh's wild, ominous persistence in his suit, her aunt's coldness, her own loneliness, were all forgotten, and she could almost have danced with joy. Nattee laughed aloud, and talked and chuckled to herself—"Old Indian woman great mystery. Old Indian woman sent hither and thither; go where she is told, where she hears with her ears. But old Indian woman"—and here she drew herself up, and the expression of her face quite changed—"know how to call, and then white man must come; and old Indian woman have spoken never a word, and white man have heard nothing with his ears." So the old crone muttered.

All this time, things were going on very differently in the keeping-room to what Lois imagined. Faith sat stiller even than usual; her eyes downcast, her words few. A quick observer might have noticed a certain tremulousness about her hands, and an occasional twitching throughout all her frame. But Pastor Nolan was not a keen observer upon this occasion; he was absorbed with his own little wonders and perplexities. His wonder was that of a carnal man—who that pretty stranger might be, who had seemed, on his first coming, so glad to see him, but had vanished instantly, apparently not to reappear. And, indeed, I am not sure if his perplexity was not that of a carnal man rather than that of a godly minister, for this was his dilemma. It was the custom of Salem (as we have already seen) for the minister, on entering a household for the visit which, among other people and in other times, would have been termed a "morning call," to put up a prayer for the eternal welfare of the family under whose roof-tree he was. Now this prayer was expected to be adapted to the individual character, joys, sorrows, wants, and failings of every member present; and here was he, a young pastor, alone with a young woman; and he thought—vain thoughts, perhaps, but still very natural—that the implied guesses at her character, involved in the minute supplications above described, would be very awkward in a *tête-à-tête* prayer; so, whether it was his wonder

or his perplexity, I do not know, but he did not contribute much to the conversation for some time, and at last, by a sudden burst of courage and impromptu hit, he cut the Gordian knot by making the usual proposal for prayer, and adding to it a request that the household might be summoned. In came Lois, quiet and decorous; in came Nattee, all one impassive, stiff piece of wood—no look of intelligence or trace of giggling near her countenance. Solemnly recalling each wandering thought, Pastor Nolan knelt in the midst of these three to pray. He was a good and truly religious man, whose name here is the only thing disguised, and played his part bravely in the awful trial to which he was afterwards subjected; and if, at the time, before he went through his fiery persecutions, the human fancies which beset all young hearts came across his, we at this day know that these fancies are no sin. But now he prays in earnest, prays so heartily for himself, with such a sense of his own spiritual need and spiritual failings, that each one of his hearers feels as if a prayer and a supplication had gone up for each of them. Even Nattee muttered the few words she knew of the Lord's Prayer; gibberish though the disjointed nouns and verbs might be, the poor creature said them because she was stirred to unwonted reverence. As for Lois, she rose up comforted and strengthened, as no special prayers of Pastor Tappau had ever made her feel. But Faith was sobbing, sobbing aloud, almost hysterically, and made no effort to rise, but lay on her outstretched arms spread out upon the settle. Lois and Pastor Nolan looked at each other for an instant. Then Lois said—

"Sir, you must go. My cousin has not been strong for some time, and doubtless she needs more quiet than she has had to-day."

Pastor Nolan bowed, and left the house; but in a moment he returned. Half-opening the door, but without entering, he said—

"I come back to ask, if perchance I may call this evening to inquire how young Mistress Hickson finds herself?"

But Faith did not hear this; she was sobbing louder than ever.

"Why did you send him away, Lois? I should have been better directly, and it is so long since I have seen him."

She had her face hidden as she uttered these words, and Lois could not hear them distinctly. She bent her head down by her cousin's on the settle, meaning to ask her to repeat what she had said. But in the irritation of the moment, and prompted possibly by some incipient jealousy, Faith pushed Lois away so violently that the latter was hurt against the hard, sharp corner of the wooden settle. Tears came into her eyes; not so much because her cheek was bruised, as because of the surprised pain she felt at this repulse from the cousin towards whom she was feeling so warmly and kindly. Just for the moment, Lois was as angry as any child could have been; but some of the words of Pastor Nolan's prayer yet rang in her ears, and she thought it would be a shame if she did not let them sink into her heart. She dared not, however, stoop again to caress Faith, but stood quietly by her, sorrowfully waiting; until a step at the outer door caused Faith to rise quickly, and rush into the kitchen, leaving Lois to bear the brunt of the new-comer. It was Manasseh, returned from hunting. He had been two days away, in company with other young men belonging to Salem. It was almost the only occupation which could draw him out of his secluded habits. He stopped suddenly at the door on seeing Lois, and alone; for she had avoided him of late in every possible way.

"Where is my mother?"

"At a prayer-meeting at Pastor Tappau's. She has taken Prudence. Faith has left the room this minute. I will call her." And Lois was going towards the kitchen, when he placed himself between her and the door.

"Lois," said he, "the time is going by, and I cannot wait much longer. The visions come thick upon me, and my sight grows clearer and clearer. Only this last night, camping out in the woods, I saw in my soul, between sleeping

and waking, the spirit come and offer thee two lots; and the colour of the one was white, like a bride's, and the other was black and red, which is, being interpreted, a violent death. And, when thou didst choose the latter, the spirit said unto me, 'Come!' and I came, and did as I was bidden. I put it on thee with mine own hands, as it is pre-ordained, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice and be my wife. And when the black and red dress fell to the ground, thou wert even as a corpse three days old. Now, be advised, Lois, in time! Lois, my cousin, I have seen it in a vision, and my soul cleaveth unto thee—I would fain spare thee."

He was really in earnest—in passionate earnest; whatever his visions, as he called them, might be, he believed in them, and this belief gave something of unselfishness to his love for Lois. This she felt at this moment, if she had never done so before; and it seemed like a contrast to the repulse she had just met with from his sister. He had drawn near her, and now he took hold of her hand, repeating in his wild, pathetic, dreamy way—

"And the voice said unto me, 'Marry Lois!'" And Lois was more inclined to soothe and reason with him than she had ever been before, since the first time of his speaking to her on the subject—when Grace Hickson and Prudence entered the room from the passage. They had returned from the prayer-meeting by the back-way, which had prevented the sound of their approach from being heard.

But Manasseh did not stir or look round; he kept his eyes fixed on Lois, as if to note the effect of his words. Grace came hastily forwards and, lifting up her strong right arm, smote their joined hands in twain, in spite of the fervour of Manasseh's grasp.

"What means this?" said she, addressing herself more to Lois than to her son, anger flashing out of her deep-set eyes.

Lois waited for Manasseh to speak. He seemed, but a few minutes before, to be more gentle and less threatening than he had been of late on this subject, and she did not

wish to irritate him. But he did not speak, and her aunt stood angrily waiting for an answer.

"At any rate," thought Lois, "it will put an end to the thought in his mind, when my aunt speaks out about it."

"My cousin seeks me in marriage," said Lois.

"Thee!" and Grace struck out in the direction of her niece with a gesture of supreme contempt. But now Manasseh spoke forth—

"Yea! it is pre-ordained. The voice has said it, and the spirit has brought her to me as my bride."

"Spirit! an evil spirit then! A good spirit would have chosen out for thee a godly maiden of thine own people, and not a prelatist and a stranger like this girl. A pretty return, Mistress Lois, for all our kindness!"

"Indeed, Aunt Hickson, I have done all I could—Cousin Manasseh knows it—to show him I can be none of his. I have told him," said she, blushing, but determined to say the whole out at once, "that I am all but troth-plight to a young man of our own village at home; and even putting all that on one side, I wish not for marriage at present."

"Wish rather for conversion and regeneration! Marriage is an unseemly word in the mouth of a maiden. As for Manasseh, I will take reason with him in private; and, meanwhile, if thou hast spoken truly, throw not thyself in his path, as I have noticed thou hast done but too often of late."

Lois's heart burnt within her at this unjust accusation, for she knew how much she had dreaded and avoided her cousin, and she almost looked to him to give evidence that her aunt's last words were not true. But, instead, he recurred to his one fixed idea, and said—

"Mother, listen! If I wed not Lois, both she and I die within the year. I care not for life; before this, as you know, I have sought for death" (Grace shuddered, and was for a moment subdued by some recollection of past horror); "but, if Lois were my wife, I should live, and she would be spared from what is the other lot. That whole vision grows

clearer to me, day by day. Yet, when I try to know whether I am one of the elect, all is dark. The mystery of Free-Will and Fore-Knowledge is a mystery of Satan's devising, not of God's."

"Alas, my son! Satan is abroad among the brethren even now; but let the old vexed topics rest! Sooner than fret thyself again, thou shalt have Lois to be thy wife, though my heart was set far differently for thee."

"No, Manasseh," said Lois. "I love you well as a cousin, but wife of yours I can never be. Aunt Hickson, it is not well to delude him so. I say, if ever I marry man, I am troth-plight to one in England."

"Tush, child! I am your guardian in my dead husband's place. Thou thinkest thyself so great a prize that I could clutch at thee whether or no, I doubt not. I value thee not, save as a medicine for Manasseh, if his mind get disturbed again, as I have noted signs of late."

This, then, was the secret explanation of much that had alarmed her in her cousin's manner: and, if Lois had been a physician of modern times, she might have traced somewhat of the same temperament in his sisters as well—in Prudence's lack of natural feeling and impish delight in mischief, in Faith's vehemence of unrequited love. But, as yet, Lois did not know, any more than Faith, that the attachment of the latter to Mr. Nolan was not merely unreturned, but even unperceived, by the young minister.

He came, it is true—came often to the house, sat long with the family, and watched them narrowly, but took no especial notice of Faith. Lois perceived this, and grieved over it; Nattee perceived it, and was indignant at it, long before Faith slowly acknowledged it to herself, and went to Nattee the Indian woman, rather than to Lois her cousin, for sympathy and counsel.

"He cares not for me," said Faith. "He cares more for Lois's little finger than for my whole body," the girl moaned out, in the bitter pain of jealousy.

"Hush thee, hush thee, prairie-bird! How can he build

a nest, when the old bird has got all the moss and the feathers? Wait till the Indian has found means to send the old bird flying far away." This was the mysterious comfort Nattee gave.

Grace Hickson took some kind of charge over Manasseh that relieved Lois of much of her distress at his strange behaviour. Yet, at times, he escaped from his mother's watchfulness, and in such opportunities he would always seek Lois, entreating her, as of old, to marry him—sometimes pleading his love for her, oftener speaking wildly of his visions and the voices which he heard foretelling a terrible futurity.

We have now to do with events which were taking place in Salem, beyond the narrow circle of the Hickson family; but, as they only concern us in as far as they bore down in their consequences on the future of those who formed part of it, I shall go over the narrative very briefly. The town of Salem had lost by death, within a very short time preceding the commencement of my story, nearly all its venerable men and leading citizens—men of ripe wisdom and sound counsel. The people had hardly yet recovered from the shock of their loss, as one by one the patriarchs of the primitive little community had rapidly followed each other to the grave. They had been beloved as fathers, and looked up to as judges in the land. The first bad effect of their loss was seen in the heated dissension which sprang up between Pastor Tappau and the candidate Nolan. It had been apparently healed over; but Mr. Nolan had not been many weeks in Salem, after his second coming, before the strife broke out afresh, and alienated many for life who had till then been bound together by the ties of friendship or relationship. Even in the Hickson family something of this feeling soon sprang up; Grace being a vehement partisan of the elder pastor's more gloomy doctrines, while Faith was a passionate, if a powerless, advocate of Mr. Nolan. Manasseh's growing absorption in his own fancies, and imagined gift of prophecy, making him comparatively indifferent to all outward events, did not tend to either the fulfilment of his visions, or the

elucidation of the dark mysterious doctrines over which he had pondered too long for the health either of his mind or body; while Prudence delighted in irritating every one by her advocacy of the views of thinking to which they were most opposed, and relating every gossiping story to the person most likely to disbelieve, and to be indignant at, what she told with an assumed unconsciousness of any such effect to be produced. There was much talk of the congregational difficulties and dissensions being carried up to the general court; and each party naturally hoped that, if such were the course of events, the opposing pastor and that portion of the congregation which adhered to him might be worsted in the struggle.

Such was the state of things in the township, when, one day towards the end of the month of February, Grace Hickson returned from the weekly prayer-meeting, which it was her custom to attend at Pastor Tappau's house, in a state of extreme excitement. On her entrance into her own house she sat down, rocking her body backwards and forwards, and praying to herself. Both Faith and Lois stopped their spinning, in wonder at her agitation, before either of them ventured to address her. At length Faith rose, and spoke—

"Mother, what is it? Hath anything happened of any evil nature?"

The brave, stern old woman's face was blenched, and her eyes were almost set in horror, as she prayed; the great drops running down her cheeks.

It seemed almost as if she had to make a struggle to recover her sense of the present homely accustomed life, before she could find words to answer—

"Evil nature! Daughters, Satan is abroad—is close to us; I have this very hour seen him afflict two innocent children, as of old he troubled those who were possessed by him in Judea. Hester and Abigail Tappau have been contorted and convulsed by him and his servants into such shapes as I am afeared to think on; and when their father, godly Mr. Tappau, began to exhort and to pray, their howlings were like the

wild beasts of the field. Satan is of a truth let loose among us. The girls kept calling upon him, as if he were even then present among us. Abigail screeched out that he stood at my very back in the guise of a black man; and truly, as I turned round at her words, I saw a creature like a shadow vanishing, and turned all of a cold sweat. Who knows where he is now? Faith, lay straws across on the door-sill!"

"But, if he be already entered in," asked Prudence, "may not that make it difficult for him to depart?"

Her mother, taking no notice of her question, went on rocking herself, and praying, till again she broke out into narration—

"Reverend Mr. Tappau says, that only last night he heard a sound as of a heavy body dragged all through the house by some strong power; once it was thrown against his bedroom door, and would, doubtless, have broken it in, if he had not prayed fervently and aloud at that very time; and a shriek went up at his prayer that made his hair stand on end; and this morning all the crockery in the house was found broken and piled up in the middle of the kitchen floor; and Pastor Tappau says that, as soon as he began to ask a blessing on the morning's meal, Abigail and Hester cried out, as if some one was pinching them. Lord, have mercy upon us all! Satan is of a truth let loose."

"They sound like the old stories I used to hear in Barford," said Lois, breathless with affright.

Faith seemed less alarmed; but then her dislike to Pastor Tappau was so great, that she could hardly sympathise with any misfortunes that befell him or his family.

Towards evening Mr. Nolan came in. In general, so high did party spirit run, Grace Hickson only tolerated his visits, finding herself often engaged at such hours, and being too much abstracted in thought to show him the ready hospitality which was one of her most prominent virtues. But to-day, both as bringing the latest intelligence of the new horrors sprung up in Salem, and as being one of the Church militant (or what the Puritans considered as

equivalent to the Church militant) against Satan, he was welcomed by her in an unusual manner.

He seemed oppressed with the occurrences of the day; at first it appeared to be almost a relief to him to sit still, and cogitate upon them, and his hosts were becoming almost impatient for him to say something more than mere monosyllables, when he began—

"Such a day as this I pray that I may never see again. It is as if the devils, whom our Lord banished into the herd of swine, had been permitted to come again upon the earth. And I would it were only the lost spirits who were tormenting us; but I much fear that certain of those whom we have esteemed as God's people have sold their souls to Satan, for the sake of a little of his evil power, whereby they may afflict others for a time. Elder Sherringham hath lost this very day a good and valuable horse, wherewith he used to drive his family to meeting."

"Perchance," said Lois, "the horse died of some natural disease."

"True," said Pastor Nolan; "but I was going on to say, that, as he entered into his house, full of dolour at the loss of his beast, a mouse ran in before him so sudden that it almost tripped him up, though an instant before there was no such thing to be seen; and he caught at it with his shoe and hit it, and it cried out like a human creature in pain, and straight ran up the chimney, caring nothing for the hot flame and smoke."

Manasseh listened greedily to all this story; and, when it was ended he smote his breast, and prayed aloud for deliverance from the power of the Evil One; and he continually went on praying at intervals through the evening, with every mark of abject terror on his face and in his manner —he, the bravest, most daring hunter in all the settlement. Indeed, all the family huddled together in silent fear, scarcely finding any interest in the usual household occupations. Faith and Lois sat with arms entwined, as in days before the former had become jealous of the latter; Prudence

asked low, fearful questions of her mother and of the pastor as to the creatures that were abroad, and the ways in which they afflicted others; and, when Grace besought the minister to pray for her and her household, he made a long and passionate supplication that none of that little flock might ever so far fall away into hopeless perdition as to be guilty of the sin without forgiveness—the Sin of Witchcraft.

CHAPTER III

"The Sin of Witchcraft." We read about it, we look on it from the outside; but we can hardly realise the terror it induced. Every impulsive or unaccustomed action, every little nervous affection, every ache or pain was noticed, not merely by those around the sufferer, but by the person himself, whoever he might be, that was acting, or being acted upon, in any but the most simple and ordinary manner. He or she (for it was most frequently a woman or girl that was the supposed subject) felt a desire for some unusual kind of food—some unusual motion or rest—her hand twitched, her foot was asleep, or her leg had the cramp; and the dreadful question immediately suggested itself, "Is any one possessing an evil power over me; by the help of Satan?" and perhaps they went on to think, "It is bad enough to feel that my body can be made to suffer through the power of some unknown evil-wisher to me; but what if Satan gives them still further power, and they can touch my soul, and inspire me with loathful thoughts leading me into crimes which at present I abhor?" and so on, till the very dread of what might happen, and the constant dwelling of the thoughts, even with horror, upon certain possibilities, or what were esteemed such, really brought about the corruption of imagination at last, which at first they had shuddered at. Moreover, there was a sort of uncertainty as to who

might be infected—not unlike the overpowering dread of the plague, which made some shrink from their best-beloved with irrepressible fear. The brother or sister, who was the dearest friend of their childhood and youth, might now be bound in some mysterious deadly pact with evil spirits of the most horrible kind—who could tell? And in such a case it became a duty, a sacred duty, to give up the earthly body which had been once so loved, but which was now the habitation of a soul corrupt and horrible in its evil inclinations. Possibly, terror of death might bring on confession, and repentance, and purification. Or if it did not, why, away with the evil creature, the witch, out of the world, down to the kingdom of the master, whose bidding was done on earth in all manner of corruption and torture of God's creatures! There were others who, to these more simple, if more ignorant, feelings of horror at witches and witchcraft, added the desire, conscious or unconscious, of revenge on those whose conduct had been in any way displeasing to them. Where evidence takes a supernatural character, there is no disproving it. This argument comes up: "You have only the natural powers; I have supernatural. You admit the existence of the supernatural by the condemnation of this very crime of witchcraft. You hardly know the limits of the natural powers; how, then, can you define the supernatural? I say that in the dead of night, when my body seemed to all present to be lying in quiet sleep, I was, in the most complete and wakeful consciousness, present in my body at an assembly of witches and wizards, with Satan at their head; that I was by them tortured in my body, because my soul would not acknowledge him as its king; and that I witnessed such and such deeds. What the nature of the appearance was that took the semblance of myself, sleeping quietly in my bed, I know not; but, admitting, as you do, the possibility of witchcraft, you cannot disprove my evidence." The evidence might be given truly or falsely, as the person witnessing believed it or not; but every one must see what immense and terrible power was abroad for

revenge. Then, again, the accused themselves ministered to the horrible panic abroad. Some, in dread of death, confessed from cowardice to the imaginary crimes of which they were accused, and of which they were promised a pardon on confession. Some, weak and terrified, came honestly to believe in their own guilt, through the diseases of imagination which were sure to be engendered at such a time as this.

Lois sat spinning with Faith. Both were silent, pondering over the stories that were abroad. Lois spoke first.

"Oh, Faith! this country is worse than ever England was, even in the days of Master Matthew Hopkinson, the witch-finder. I grow frightened of every one, I think. I even get afeared sometimes of Nattee!"

Faith coloured a little. Then she asked—

"Why? What should make you distrust the Indian woman?"

"Oh! I am ashamed of my fear as soon as it arises in my mind. But, you know, her look and colour were strange to me when I first came; and she is not a christened woman; and they tell stories of Indian wizards; and I know not what the mixtures are which she is sometimes stirring over the fire, nor the meaning of the strange chants she sings to herself. And once I met her in the dusk, just close by Pastor Tappau's house, in company with Hota, his servant—it was just before we heard of the sore disturbance in his house—and I have wondered if she had aught to do with it."

Faith sat very still, as if thinking. At last she said—

"If Nattee has powers beyond what you and I have, she will not use them for evil; at least not evil to those whom she loves."

"That comforts me but little," said Lois. "If she has powers beyond what she ought to have, I dread her, though I have done her no evil; nay, though I could almost say she bore me a kindly feeling. But such powers are only given by the Evil One; and the proof thereof is, that, as you imply, Nattee would use them on those who offend her."

"And why should she not?" asked Faith, lifting her eyes, and flashing heavy fire out of them, at the question.

"Because," said Lois, not seeing Faith's glance, "we are told to pray for them that despitefully use us, and to do good to them that persecute us. But poor Nattee is not a christened woman. I would that Mr. Nolan would baptize her: it would, maybe, take her out of the power of Satan's temptations."

"Are you never tempted?" asked Faith half-scornfully; "and yet I doubt not you were well baptized!"

"True," said Lois sadly; "I often do very wrong; but, perhaps, I might have done worse, if the holy form had not been observed."

They were again silent for a time.

"Lois," said Faith, "I did not mean any offence. But do you never feel as if you would give up all that future life, of which the parsons talk, and which seems so vague and so distant, for a few years of real, vivid blessedness, to begin to-morrow—this hour—this minute? Oh! I could think of happiness for which I would willingly give up all those misty chances of heaven"——

"Faith, Faith!" cried Lois in terror, holding her hand before her cousin's mouth, and looking around in fright. "Hush! you know not who may be listening; you are putting yourself in his power."

But Faith pushed her hand away, and said, "Lois, I believe in him no more than I believe in heaven. Both may exist; but they are so far away that I defy them. Why all this ado about Mr. Tappau's house—promise me never to tell living creature, and I will tell you a secret."

"No!" said Lois, terrified. "I dread all secrets. I will hear none. I will do all that I can for you, Cousin Faith, in any way; but just at this time, I strive to keep my life and thoughts within the strictest bounds of godly simplicity, and I dread pledging myself to aught that is hidden and secret."

"As you will, cowardly girl, full of terrors, which, if you

had listened to me, might have been lessened, if not entirely done away with." And Faith would not utter another word, though Lois tried meekly to entice her into conversation on some other subject.

The rumour of witchcraft was like the echo of thunder among the hills. It had broken out in Mr. Tappau's house, and his two little daughters were the first supposed to be bewitched; but round about, from every quarter of the town, came in accounts of sufferers by witchcraft. There was hardly a family without one of these supposed victims. Then arose a growl and menaces of vengeance from many a household—menaces deepened, not daunted, by the terror and mystery of the suffering that gave rise to them.

At length a day was appointed when, after solemn fasting and prayer, Mr. Tappau invited the neighbouring ministers and all godly people to assemble at his house, and unite with him in devoting a day to solemn religious services, and to supplication for the deliverance of his children, and those similarly afflicted, from the power of the Evil One. All Salem poured out towards the house of the minister. There was a look of excitement on all their faces; eagerness and horror were depicted on many, while stern resolution, amounting to determined cruelty, if the occasion arose, was seen on others.

In the midst of the prayer, Hester Tappau, the younger girl, fell into convulsions; fit after fit came on, and her screams mingled with the shrieks and cries of the assembled congregation. In the first pause, when the child was partially recovered, when the people stood around, exhausted and breathless, her father, the Pastor Tappau, lifted his right hand, and adjured her, in the name of the Trinity, to say who tormented her. There was a dead silence; not a creature stirred of all those hundreds. Hester turned wearily and uneasily, and moaned out the name of Hota, her father's Indian servant. Hota was present, apparently as much interested as any one; indeed, she had been busying herself much in bringing remedies to the suffering child.

But now she stood aghast, transfixed, while her name was caught up and shouted out in tones of reprobation and hatred by all the crowd around her. Another moment, and they would have fallen upon the trembling creature and torn her limb from limb—pale, dusky, shivering Hota, half guilty-looking from her very bewilderment. But Pastor Tappau, that gaunt, grey man, lifting himself to his utmost height, signed to them to go back, to keep still while he addressed them; and then he told them that instant vengeance was not just, deliberate punishment; that there would be need of conviction, perchance of confession; he hoped for some redress for his suffering children from her revelations, if she were brought to confession. They must leave the culprit in his hands, and in those of his brother ministers, that they might wrestle with Satan before delivering her up to the civil power. He spoke well; for he spoke from the heart of a father seeing his children exposed to dreadful and mysterious suffering, and firmly believing that he now held the clue in his hand which should ultimately release them and their fellow-sufferers. And the congregation moaned themselves into unsatisfied submission, and listened to his long, passionate prayer, which he uplifted even while the hapless Hota stood there, guarded and bound by two men, who glared at her like blood-hounds ready to slip, even while the prayer ended in the words of the merciful Saviour.

Lois sickened and shuddered at the whole scene; and this was no intellectual shuddering at the folly and superstition of the people, but tender moral shuddering at the sight of guilt which she believed in, and at the evidence of men's hatred and abhorrence, which, when shown even to the guilty, troubled and distressed her merciful heart. She followed her aunt and cousins out into the open air, with downcast eyes and pale face. Grace Hickson was going home with a feeling of triumphant relief at the detection of the guilty one. Faith alone seemed uneasy and disturbed beyond her wont; for Manasseh received the whole

transaction as the fulfilment of a prophecy, and Prudence was excited by the novel scene into a state of discordant high spirits.

"I am quite as old as Hester Tappau," said she; "her birthday is in September and mine in October."

"What has that to do with it?" said Faith sharply.

"Nothing; only she seemed such a little thing for all those grave ministers to be praying for, and so many folk come from a distance; some from Boston, they said, all for her sake, as it were. Why, didst thou see, it was godly Mr. Henwick that held her head when she wriggled so, and old Madam Holbrook had herself helped up on a chair to see the better? I wonder how long I might wriggle, before great and godly folk would take so much notice of me? But, I suppose, that comes of being a pastor's daughter. She'll be so set up, there'll be no speaking to her now. Faith! thinkest thou that Hota really had bewitched her? She gave me corn-cakes the last time I was at Pastor Tappau's, just like any other woman, only, perchance, a trifle more good-natured; and to think of her being a witch after all!"

But Faith seemed in a hurry to reach home, and paid no attention to Prudence's talking. Lois hastened on with Faith; for Manasseh was walking alongside of his mother, and she kept steady to her plan of avoiding him, even though she pressed her company upon Faith, who had seemed of late desirous of avoiding her.

That evening the news spread through Salem, that Hota had confessed her sin—had acknowledged that she was a witch. Nattee was the first to hear the intelligence. She broke into the room where the girls were sitting with Grace Hickson, solemnly doing nothing, because of the great prayer-meeting in the morning, and cried out, "Mercy, mercy, mistress, everybody! take care of poor Indian Nattee, who never do wrong, but for mistress and the family! Hota one bad, wicked witch; she say so herself; oh, me! oh, me!" and, stooping over Faith, she said something in a low, miserable tone of voice, of which Lois only heard the word

"torture." But Faith heard all, and, turning very pale, half-accompanied, half-led Nattee back to her kitchen.

Presently, Grace Hickson came in. She had been out to see a neighbour: it will not do to say that so godly a woman had been gossiping; and, indeed, the subject of the conversation she had held was of too serious and momentous a nature for me to employ a light word to designate it. There was all the listening to, and repeating of, small details and rumours, in which the speakers have no concern, that constitutes gossiping; but, in this instance, all trivial facts and speeches might be considered to bear such dreadful significance, and might have so ghastly an ending, that such whispers were occasionally raised to a tragic importance. Every fragment of intelligence that related to Mr. Tappau's household was eagerly snatched at: how his dog howled all one long night through, and could not be stilled; how his cow suddenly failed in her milk, only two months after she had calved; how his memory had forsaken him one morning, for a minute or two, in repeating the Lord's Prayer, and he had even omitted a clause thereof in his sudden perturbation; and how all these forerunners of his children's strange illness might now be interpreted and understood—this had formed the staple of the conversation between Grace Hickson and her friends. There had arisen a dispute among them at last, as to how far these subjections to the power of the Evil One were to be considered as a judgment upon Pastor Tappau for some sin on his part; and if so, what? It was not an unpleasant discussion, although there was considerable difference of opinion; for, as none of the speakers had had their families so troubled, it was rather a proof that they had none of them committed any sin. In the midst of this talk, one, entering in from the street, brought the news that Hota had confessed all—had owned to signing a certain little red book which Satan had presented to her—had been present at impious sacraments—had ridden through the air to Newbury Falls—and, in fact, had assented to all the questions which the elders and magistrates, carefully reading over the

confessions of the witches who had formerly been tried in England, in order that they might not omit a single inquiry, had asked of her. More she had owned to, but things of inferior importance, and partaking more of the nature of earthly tricks than of spiritual power. She had spoken of carefully-adjusted strings, by which all the crockery in Pastor Tappau's house could be pulled down or disturbed; but of such intelligible malpractices the gossips of Salem took little heed. One of them said that such an action showed Satan's prompting; but they all preferred to listen to the grander guilt of the blasphemous sacraments and supernatural rides. The narrator ended with saying that Hota was to be hung the next morning, in spite of her confession, even although her life had been promised to her if she acknowledged her sin; for it was well to make an example of the first-discovered witch, and it was also well that she was an Indian, a heathen, whose life would be no great loss to the community. Grace Hickson on this spoke out. It was well that witches should perish off the face of the earth, Indian or English, heathen or, worse, a baptized Christian who had betrayed the Lord, even as Judas did, and had gone over to Satan. For her part, she wished that the first-discovered witch had been a member of a godly English household, that it might be seen of all men that religious folk were willing to cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye, if tainted with the devilish sin. She spoke sternly and well. The last comer said that her words might be brought to the proof, for it had been whispered that Hota had named others, and some from the most religious families of Salem, whom she had seen among the unholy communicants at the sacraments of the Evil One. And Grace replied that she would answer for it, all godly folk would stand the proof, and quench all natural affection rather than that such a sin should grow and spread among them. She herself had a weak bodily dread of witnessing the violent death even of an animal; but she would not let that deter her from standing amidst those who cast the

accursed creature out from among them on the morrow morning.

Contrary to her wont, Grace Hickson told her family much of this conversation. It was a sign of her excitement on the subject that she thus spoke, and the excitement spread in different forms through her family. Faith was flushed and restless, wandering between the keeping-room and the kitchen, and questioning her mother particularly as to the more extraordinary parts of Hota's confession, as if she wished to satisfy herself that the Indian witch had really done those horrible and mysterious deeds.

Lois shivered and trembled with affright at the narration, and at the idea that such things were possible. Occasionally she found herself wandering off into sympathetic thought for the woman who was to die, abhorred of all men, and unpardoned by God, to whom she had been so fearful a traitor, and who was now, at this very time—when Lois sat among her kindred by the warm and cheerful firelight, anticipating many peaceful, perchance happy, morrows—solitary, shivering, panic-stricken, guilty, with none to stand by her and exhort her, shut up in darkness between the cold walls of the town prison. But Lois almost shrank from sympathising with so loathsome an accomplice of Satan, and prayed for forgiveness for her charitable thought; and yet, again, she remembered the tender spirit of the Saviour, and allowed herself to fall into pity, till at last her sense of right and wrong became so bewildered that she could only leave all to God's disposal, and just ask that he would take all creatures and all events into His hands.

Prudence was as bright as if she were listening to some merry story—curious as to more than her mother would tell her—seeming to have no particular terror of witches or witchcraft, and yet to be especially desirous to accompany her mother the next morning to the hanging. Lois shrank from the cruel, eager face of the young girl, as she begged her mother to allow her to go. Even Grace was disturbed and perplexed by her daughter's pertinacity.

"No," said she. "Ask me no more! Thou shalt not go. Such sights are not for the young. I go, and I sicken at the thoughts of it. But I go to show that I, a Christian woman, take God's part against the devil's. Thou shalt not go, I tell thee. I could whip thee for thinking of it."

"Manasseh says Hota was well whipped by Pastor Tappau ere she was brought to confession," said Prudence, as if anxious to change the subject of discussion.

Manasseh lifted up his head from the great folio Bible, brought by his father from England, which he was studying. He had not heard what Prudence said, but he looked up at the sound of his name. All present were startled at his wild eyes, his bloodless face. But he was evidently annoyed at the expression of their countenaces.

"Why look ye at me in that manner?" asked he. And his manner was anxious and agitated. His mother made haste to speak—

"It was but that Prudence said something that thou hast told her—that Pastor Tappau defiled his hands by whipping the witch Hota. What evil thought has got hold of thee? Talk to us, and crack not thy skull against the learning of man."

"It is not the learning of man that I study; it is the Word of God. I would fain know more of the nature of this sin of witchcraft, and whether it be, indeed, the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. At times I feel a creeping influence coming over me, prompting all evil thoughts and unheard-of deeds, and I question within myself, 'Is not this the power of witchcraft?' and I sicken, and loathe all that I do or say; and yet some evil creature hath the mastery over me, and I must needs do and say what I loathe and dread. Why wonder you, mother, that I, of all men, strive to learn the exact nature of witchcraft, and for that end study the Word of God? Have you not seen me when I was, as it were, possessed with a devil?"

He spoke calmly, sadly, but as under deep conviction. His mother rose to comfort him.

"My son," she said, "no one ever saw thee do deeds, or heard thee utter words, which any one could say were prompted by devils. We have seen thee, poor lad, with thy wits gone astray for a time; but all thy thoughts sought rather God's will in forbidden places, than lost the clue to them for one moment in hankering after the powers of darkness. Those days are long past; a future lies before thee. Think not of witches, or of being subject to the power of witchcraft. I did evil to speak of it before thee. Let Lois come and sit by thee, and talk to thee."

Lois went to her cousin, grieved at heart for his depressed state of mind, anxious to soothe and comfort him, and yet recoiling more than ever from the idea of ultimately becoming his wife—an idea to which she saw her aunt reconciling herself unconsciously day by day, as she perceived the English girl's power of soothing and comforting her cousin, even by the very tones of her sweet cooing voice.

He took Lois's hand.

"Let me hold it! It does me good," said he. "Ah, Lois, when I am by you, I forget all my troubles—will the day never come when you will listen to the voice that speaks to me continually?"

"I never hear it, Cousin Manasseh," she said softly; "but do not think of the voices. Tell me of the land you hope to enclose from the forest—what manner of trees grow on it?"

Thus, by simple questions on practical affairs, she led him back, in her unconscious wisdom, to the subjects on which he had always shown strong practical sense. He talked on these, with all due discretion, till the hour for family prayer came round, which was early in those days. It was Manasseh's place to conduct it, as head of the family; a post which his mother had always been anxious to assign to him since her husband's death. He prayed extempore, and to-night his supplications wandered off into wild, unconnected fragments of prayer, which all those kneeling around began, each according to her anxiety for the speaker, to think would

never end. Minutes elapsed, and grew to quarters of an hour, and his words only became more emphatic and wilder, praying for himself alone, and laying bare the recesses of his heart. At length his mother rose, and took Lois by the hand; for she had faith in Lois's power over her son, as being akin to that which the shepherd David, playing on his harp, had over king Saul sitting on his throne. She drew her towards him, where he knelt facing into the circle, with his eyes upturned, and the tranced agony of his face depicting the struggle of the troubled soul within.

"Here is Lois," said Grace, almost tenderly; "she would fain go to her chamber." (Down the girl's face the tears were streaming.) "Rise, and finish thy prayer in thy closet."

But at Lois's approach he sprang to his feet—sprang aside.

"Take her away, mother! Lead me not into temptation! She brings me evil and sinful thoughts. She overshadows me, even in the presence of my God. She is no angel of light, or she would not do this. She troubles me with the sound of a voice bidding me marry her, even when I am at my prayers. Avaunt! Take her away!"

He would have struck at Lois, if she had not shrunk back, dismayed and affrighted. His mother, although equally dismayed, was not affrighted. She had seen him thus before, and understood the management of his paroxysm.

"Go, Lois! the sight of thee irritates him, as once that of Faith did. Leave him to me!"

And Lois rushed away to her room, and threw herself on her bed, like a panting, hunted creature. Faith came after her slowly and heavily.

"Lois," said she, "wilt thou do me a favour? It is not much to ask. Wilt thou arise before daylight, and bear this letter from me to Pastor Nolan's lodgings? I would have done it myself; but mother has bidden me to come to her, and I may be detained until the time when Hota is to be hung; and the letter tells of matters pertaining to life and

death. Seek out Pastor Nolan, wherever he may be, and have speech of him after he has read the letter."

"Cannot Nattee take it?" asked Lois.

"No!" Faith answered fiercely. "Why should she?"

But Lois did not reply. A quick suspicion darted through Faith's mind, sudden as lightning. It had never entered there before.

"Speak, Lois! I read thy thoughts. Thou would'st fain not be the bearer of this letter?"

"I will take it," said Lois meekly. "It concerns life and death, you say?"

"Yes!" said Faith, in quite a different tone of voice. But, after a pause of thought, she added: "Then, as soon as the house is still, I will write what I have to say, and leave it here on this chest; and thou wilt promise me to take it before the day is fully up, while there is yet time for action."

"Yes; I promise," said Lois. And Faith knew enough of her to feel sure that the deed would be done, however reluctantly.

The letter was written—laid on the chest; and, ere day dawned, Lois was astir, Faith watching her from between her half-closed eyelids—eyelids that had never been fully closed in sleep the livelong night. The instant Lois, cloaked and hooded, left the room, Faith sprang up, and prepared to go to her mother, whom she heard already stirring. Nearly every one in Salem was awake and up on this awful morning, though few were out-of-doors, as Lois passed along the streets. Here was the hastily-erected gallows, the black shadow of which fell across the street with ghastly significance; now she had to pass the iron-barred gaol, through the unglazed windows of which she heard the fearful cry of a woman, and the sound of many footsteps. On she sped, sick almost to faintness, to the widow woman's where Mr. Nolan lodged. He was already up and abroad, gone, his hostess believed, to the gaol. Thither Lois, repeating the words "for life and for death!" was forced to go. Retracing her steps, she was thankful to see him come out of those

dismal portals, rendered more dismal for being in heavy shadow, just as she approached. What his errand had been she knew not; but he looked grave and sad, as she put Faith's letter into his hands, and stood before him quietly waiting until he should read it, and deliver the expected answer. But, instead of opening it, he hid it in his hand, apparently absorbed in thought. At last he spoke aloud, but more to himself than to her—

"My God! and is she, then, to die in this fearful delirium? It must be—can be—only delirium, that prompts such wild and horrible confessions. Mistress Barclay, I come from the presence of the Indian woman appointed to die. It seems, she considered herself betrayed last evening by her sentence not being respited, even after she had made confession of sin enough to bring down fire from heaven; and, it seems to me, the passionate, impotent anger of this helpless creature has turned to madness, for she appals me by the additional revelations she has made to the keepers during the night—to me this morning. I could almost fancy that she thinks, by deepening the guilt she confesses, to escape this last dread punishment of all; as if, were a tithe of what she says true, one could suffer such a sinner to live! Yet to send her to death in such a state of mad terror! What is to be done?"

"Yet Scripture says that we are not to suffer witches in the land," said Lois slowly.

"True; I would but ask for a respite, till the prayers of God's people had gone up for His mercy. Some would pray for her, poor wretch as she is. You would, Mistress Barclay, I am sure?" But he said it in a questioning tone.

"I have been praying for her in the night many a time," said Lois, in a low voice. "I pray for her in my heart at this moment; I suppose they are bidden to put her out of the land, but I would not have her entirely God-forsaken. But, sir, you have not read my cousin's letter. And she bade me bring back an answer with much urgency."

Still he delayed. He was thinking of the dreadful

confession he came from hearing. If it were true, the beautiful earth was a polluted place, and he almost wished to die, to escape from such pollution, into the white innocence of those who stood in the presence of God.

Suddenly his eyes fell on Lois's pure, grave face, upturned and watching his. Faith in earthly goodness came over his soul in that instant, "and he blessed her unaware."

He put his hand on her shoulder, with an action half paternal—although the difference in their ages was not above a dozen years—and, bending a little towards her, whispered, half to himself, "Mistress Barclay, you have done me good."

"I!" said Lois, half-affrighted; "I done you good! How?"

"By being what you are. But, perhaps, I should rather thank God, who sent you at the very moment when my soul was so disquieted."

At this instant, they were aware of Faith standing in front of them, with a countenance of thunder. Her angry look made Lois feel guilty. She had not enough urged the pastor to read his letter, she thought; and it was indignation at this delay in what she had been commissioned to do with the urgency of life or death, that made her cousin lower at her so from beneath her straight black brows. Lois explained how she had not found Mr. Nolan at his lodgings, and had had to follow him to the door of the gaol. But Faith replied, with obdurate contempt—

"Spare thy breath, Cousin Lois! It is easy seeing on what pleasant matters thou and the Pastor Nolan were talking. I marvel not at thy forgetfulness. My mind is changed. Give me back my letter, sir; it was about a poor matter—an old woman's life. And what is that compared to a young girl's love?"

Lois heard but for an instant; did not understand that her cousin, in her jealous anger, could suspect the existence of such a feeling as love between her and Mr. Nolan. No imagination as to its possibility had ever entered her mind; she had respected him, almost revered him—nay, had liked

him as the probable husband of Faith. At the thought that her cousin could believe her guilty of such treachery, her grave eyes dilated, and fixed themselves on the flaming countenance of Faith. That serious, unprotesting manner of perfect innocence must have told on her accuser, had it not been that, at the same instant, the latter caught sight of the crimsoned and disturbed countenance of the pastor, who felt the veil rent off the unconscious secret of his heart. Faith snatched her letter out of his hands, and said—

"Let the witch hang! What care I? She has done harm enough with her charms and her sorcery on Pastor Tappau's girls. Let her die, and let all other witches look to themselves; for there be many kinds of witchcraft abroad. Cousin Lois, thou wilt like best to stop with Pastor Nolan, or I would pray thee to come back with me to breakfast."

Lois was not to be daunted by jealous sarcasm. She held out her hand to Pastor Nolan, determined to take no heed of her cousin's mad words, but to bid him farewell in her accustomed manner. He hesitated before taking it; and, when he did, it was with a convulsive squeeze that almost made her start. Faith waited and watched all, with set lips and vengeful eyes. She bade no farewell; she spake no word; but, grasping Lois tightly by the back of the arm, she almost drove her before her down the street till they reached their home.

The arrangement for the morning was this: Grace Hickson and her son Manasseh were to be present at the hanging of the first witch executed in Salem, as pious and godly heads of a family. All the other members were strictly forbidden to stir out, until such time as the low-tolling bell announced that all was over in this world for Hota, the Indian witch. When the execution was ended, there was to be a solemn prayer-meeting of all the inhabitants of Salem; ministers had come from a distance to aid by the efficacy of their prayers in these efforts to purge the land of the devil and his servants. There was reason to think that the great old meeting-house would be crowded; and,

when Faith and Lois reached home, Grace Hickson was giving her directions to Prudence, urging her to be ready for an early start to that place. The stern old woman was troubled in her mind at the anticipation of the sight she was to see, before many minutes were over, and spoke in a more hurried and incoherent manner than was her wont. She was dressed in her Sunday best; but her face was very grey and colourless, and she seemed afraid to cease speaking about household affairs, for fear she should have time to think. Manasseh stood by her, perfectly, rigidly still; he also was in his Sunday clothes. His face, too, was paler than its wont; but it wore a kind of absent, rapt expression, almost like that of a man who sees a vision. As Faith entered, still holding Lois in her fierce grasp, Manasseh started and smiled, but still dreamily. His manner was so peculiar that even his mother stayed her talking to observe him more closely; he was in that state of excitement which usually ended in what his mother and certain of her friends esteemed a prophetic revelation. He began to speak, at first very low, and then his voice increased in power.

"How beautiful is the land of Beulah, far over the sea, beyond the mountains! Thither the angels carry her, lying back in their arms like one fainting. They shall kiss away the black circle of death, and lay her down at the feet of the Lamb. I hear her pleading there for those on earth who consented to her death. O Lois! pray also for me, pray for me, miserable!"

When he uttered his cousin's name all their eyes turned towards her. It was to her that his vision related! She stood among them, amazed, awe-stricken, but not like one affrighted or dismayed. She was the first to speak—

"Dear friends, do not think of me; his words may or may not be true. I am in God's hands all the same, whether he have the gift of prophecy or not. Besides, hear you not that I end where all would fain end? Think of him, and of his needs! Such times as these always leave him exhausted and weary, and he comes out of them."

And she busied herself in cares for his refreshment, aiding her aunt's trembling hands to set before him the requisite food, as he now sat tired and bewildered, gathering together with difficulty his scattered senses.

Prudence did all she could to assist and speed their departure. But Faith stood apart, watching in silence with her passionate, angry eyes.

As soon as they had set out on their solemn, fatal errand, Faith left the room. She had not tasted food or touched drink. Indeed, they all felt sick at heart. The moment her sister had gone upstairs, Prudence sprang to the settle on which Lois had thrown down her cloak and hood—

"Lend me your muffles and mantle, Cousin Lois. I never yet saw a woman hanged, and I see not why I should not go. I will stand on the edge of the crowd; no one will know me, and I will be home long before my mother."

"No!" said Lois, "that may not be. My aunt would be sore displeased. I wonder at you, Prudence, seeking to witness such a sight." And as she spoke she held fast her cloak, which Prudence vehemently struggled for.

Faith returned, brought back possibly by the sound of the struggle. She smiled—a deadly smile.

"Give it up, Prudence. Strive no more with her. She has bought success in this world, and we are but her slaves."

"Oh, Faith!" said Lois, relinquishing her hold of the cloak, and turning round with passionate reproach in her look and voice, "what have I done that you should speak so of me: you, that I have loved as I think one loves a sister?"

Prudence did not lose her opportunity, but hastily arrayed herself in the mantle, which was too large for her, and which she had, therefore, considered as well adapted for concealment; but, as she went towards the door, her feet became entangled in the unusual length, and she fell, bruising her arm pretty sharply.

"Take care, another time, how you meddle with a witch's

things," said Faith, as one scarcely believing her own words, but at enmity with all the world in her bitter jealousy of heart. Prudence rubbed her arm, and looked stealthily at Lois.

"Witch Lois! Witch Lois!" said she at last, softly, pulling a childish face of spite at her.

"Oh, hush, Prudence! Do not bandy such terrible words! Let me look at thine arm! I am sorry for thy hurt; only glad that it has kept thee from disobeying thy mother."

"Away, away!" said Prudence, springing from her. "I am afeared of her in very truth, Faith. Keep between me and the witch, or I will throw a stool at her."

Faith smiled—it was a bad and wicked smile—but she did not stir to calm the fears she had called up in her young sister. Just at this moment, the bell began to toll. Hota, the Indian witch, was dead. Lois covered her face with her hands. Even Faith went a deadlier pale than she had been, and said, sighing, "Poor Hota! But death is best."

Prudence alone seemed unmoved by any thoughts connected with the solemn, monotonous sound. Her only consideration was, that now she might go out into the street and see the sights, and hear the news, and escape from the terror which she felt at the presence of her cousin. She flew upstairs to find her own mantle, ran down again, and past Lois, before the English girl had finished her prayer, and was speedily mingled among the crowd going to the meeting-house. There also Faith and Lois came in due course of time, but separately, not together. Faith so evidently avoided Lois that she, humbled and grieved, could not force her company upon her cousin, but loitered a little behind—the quiet tears stealing down her face, shed for the many causes that had occurred this morning.

The meeting-house was full to suffocation; and, as it sometimes happens on such occasions, the greatest crowd was close about the doors, from the fact that few saw, on their first entrance, where there might be possible spaces into which they could wedge themselves. Yet they were impatient of any arrivals from the outside, and pushed and

hustled Faith, and after her Lois, till the two were forced on to a conspicuous place in the very centre of the building, where there was no chance of a seat, but still space to stand in. Several stood around, the pulpit being in the middle, and already occupied by two ministers in Geneva bands and gowns, while other ministers, similarly attired, stood holding on to it, almost as if they were giving support instead of receiving it. Grace Hickson and her son sat decorously in their own pew, thereby showing that they had arrived early from the execution. You might almost have traced out the number of those who had been at the hanging of the Indian witch, by the expression of their countenances. They were awe-stricken into terrible repose; while the crowd pouring in, still pouring in, of those who had not attended the execution, looked all restless, and excited, and fierce. A buzz went round the meeting that the stranger minister who stood along with Pastor Tappau in the pulpit was no other than Dr. Cotton Mather himself, come all the way from Boston to assist in purging Salem of witches.

And now Pastor Tappau began his prayer, extempore, as was the custom. His words were wild and incoherent, as might be expected from a man who had just been consenting to the bloody death of one who was, but a few days ago, a member of his own family; violent and passionate, as was to be looked for in the father of children, whom he believed to suffer so fearfully from the crime he would denounce before the Lord. He sat down at length from pure exhaustion. Then Dr. Cotton Mather stood forward; he did not utter more than a few words of prayer, calm in comparison with what had gone before, and then he went on to address the great crowd before him in a quiet, argumentative way, but arranging what he had to say with something of the same kind of skill which Antony used in his speech to the Romans after Cæsar's murder. Some of Dr. Mather's words have been preserved to us, as he afterwards wrote them down in one of his works. Speaking of those "unbelieving Sadducees" who doubted the existence of such a

crime, he said: "Instead of their apish shouts and jeers at blessed Scripture, and histories which have such undoubted confirmation as that no man that has breeding enough to regard the common laws of human society will offer to doubt of them, it becomes us rather to adore the goodness of God, who from the mouths of babes and sucklings has ordained truth, and by the means of the sore-afflicted children of your godly pastor, has revealed the fact that the devils have with most horrid operations broken in upon your neighbourhood. Let us beseech Him that their power may be restrained, and that they go not so far in their evil machinations as they did but four years ago in the city of Boston, where I was the humble means, under God, of loosing from the power of Satan the four children of that religious and blessed man, Mr. Goodwin. These four babes of grace were bewitched by an Irish witch; there is no end of the narration of the torments they had to submit to. At one time they would bark like dogs, at another purr like cats; yea, they would fly like geese, and be carried with an incredible swiftness, having but just their toes now and then upon the ground, sometimes not once in twenty feet, and their arms waved like those of a bird. Yet, at other times, by the hellish devices of the woman who had bewitched them, they could not stir without limping; for, by means of an invisible chain, she hampered their limbs, or sometimes, by means of a noose, almost choked them. One, in special, was subjected by this woman of Satan to such heat as of an oven, that I myself have seen the sweat drop from off her, while all around were moderately cold and well at ease. But not to trouble you with more of my stories, I will go on to prove that it was Satan himself that held power over her. For a very remarkable thing it was, that she was not permitted by that evil spirit to read any godly or religious book, speaking the truth as it is in Jesus. She could read Popish books well enough, while both sight and speech seemed to fail her, when I gave her the Assembly's Catechism. Again, she was fond of that prelatical Book of Common Prayer, which is but the Roman

mass-book in an English and ungodly shape. In the midst of her sufferings, if one put the Prayer-book into her hands, it relieved her. Yet, mark you, she could never be brought to read the Lord's Prayer, whatever book she met with it in, proving thereby distinctly that she was in league with the devil. I took her into my own house, that I, even as Dr. Martin Luther did, might wrestle with the devil, and have my fling at him. But, when I called my household to prayer, the devils that possessed her caused her to whistle, and sing, and yell in a discordant and hellish fashion."

At this very instant a shrill, clear whistle pierced all ears. Dr. Mather stopped for a moment—

"Satan is among you!" he cried. "Look to yourselves!" And he prayed with fervour, as if against a present and threatening enemy; but no one heeded him. Whence came that ominous, unearthly whistle? Every man watched his neighbour. Again the whistle, out of their very midst! And then a bustle in a corner of the building; three or four people stirring, without any cause immediately perceptible to those at a distance; the movement spread; and, directly after, a passage even in that dense mass of people was cleared for two men, who bore forwards Prudence Hickson, lying rigid as a log of wood, in the convulsive position of one who suffered from an epileptic fit. They laid her down among the ministers who were gathered round the pulpit. Her mother came to her, sending up a wailing cry at the sight of her distorted child. Dr. Mather came down from the pulpit and stood over her, exorcising the devil in possession, as one accustomed to such scenes. The crowd pressed forward in mute horror. At length her rigidity of form and feature gave way, and she was terribly convulsed—torn by the devil, as they called it. By-and-by, the violence of the attack was over, and the spectators began to breathe once more; though still the former horror brooded over them, and they listened as if for the sudden ominous whistle again, and glanced fearfully around, as if Satan were at their backs picking out his next victim.

Meanwhile, Dr. Mather, Pastor Tappau, and one or two others, were exhorting Prudence to reveal, if she could, the name of the person, the witch, who, by influence over Satan, had subjected the child to such torture as that which they had just witnessed. They bade her speak in the name of the Lord. She whispered a name in the low voice of exhaustion. None of the congregation could hear what it was. But the Pastor Tappau, when he heard it, drew back in dismay, while Dr. Mather, knowing not to whom the name belonged, cried out, in a clear, cold voice—

"Know ye one Lois Barclay; for it is she who hath bewitched this poor child?"

The answer was given rather by action than by word, although a low murmur went up from many. But all fell back, as far as falling back in such a crowd was possible, from Lois Barclay, where she stood—and looked on her with surprise and horror. A space of some feet, where no possibility of space had seemed to be not a minute before, left Lois standing alone, with every eye fixed upon her in hatred and dread. She stood like one speechless, tongue-tied, as if in a dream. She a witch! accursed as witches were in the sight of God and man! Her smooth, healthy face became contracted into shrivel and pallor; but she uttered not a word, only looked at Dr. Mather with her dilated terrified eyes.

Some one said, "She is of the household of Grace Hickson, a God-fearing woman." Lois did not know if the words were in her favour or not. She did not think about them, even; they told less on her than on any person present. She a witch! and the silver glittering Avon, and the drowning woman she had seen in her childhood at Barford—at home in England—was before her, and her eyes fell before her doom. There was some commotion—some rustling of papers; the magistrates of the town were drawing near the pulpit and consulting with the ministers. Dr. Mather spoke again—

"The Indian woman, who was hung this morning, named certain people, whom she deposed to having seen at the

horrible meetings for the worship of Satan; but there is no name of Lois Barclay down upon the paper, although we are stricken at the sight of the names of some "——

An interruption—a consultation. Again Dr. Mather spoke—

"Bring the accused witch, Lois Barclay, near to this poor suffering child of Christ."

They rushed forward to force Lois to the place where Prudence lay. But Lois walked forward of herself—

"Prudence," she said, in such a sweet, touching voice, that, long afterwards, those who heard it that day spoke of it to their children, "have I ever said an unkind word to you, much less done you an ill turn? Speak, dear child! You did not know what you said just now, did you?"

But Prudence writhed away from her approach, and screamed out, as if stricken with fresh agony—

"Take her away! take her away! Witch Lois! Witch Lois, who threw me down only this morning, and turned my arm black and blue." And she bared her arm, as if in confirmation of her words. It was sorely bruised.

"I was not near you, Prudence!" said Lois sadly. But that was only reckoned fresh evidence of her diabolical power.

Lois's brain began to get bewildered. "Witch Lois"! She a witch, abhorred of all men! yet she would try to think, and make one more effort.

"Aunt Hickson," she said, and Grace came forwards. "Am I a witch, Aunt Hickson?" she asked; for her aunt, stern, harsh, unloving as she might be, was truth itself; and Lois thought—so near to delirium had she come—if her aunt condemned her, it was possible she might indeed be a witch.

Grace Hickson faced her unwillingly.

"It is a stain upon our family for ever," was the thought in her mind.

"It is for God to judge whether thou art a witch or not. Not for me."

"Alas, alas!" moaned Lois; for she had looked at Faith,

and learnt that no good word was to be expected from her gloomy face and averted eyes. The meeting-house was full of eager voices, repressed, out of reverence for the place, into tones of earnest murmuring that seemed to fill the air with gathering sounds of anger; and those who had first fallen back from the place where Lois stood were now pressing forwards and round about her, ready to seize the young friendless girl, and bear her off to prison. Those who might have been, who ought to have been, her friends, were either averse or indifferent to her; though only Prudence made any open outcry upon her. That evil child cried out perpetually that Lois had cast a devilish spell upon her, and bade them keep the witch away from her; and, indeed, Prudence was strangely convulsed, when once or twice Lois's perplexed and wistful eyes were turned in her direction. Here and there, girls, women, uttering strange cries, and apparently suffering from the same kind of convulsive fit as that which had attacked Prudence, were centres of a group of agitated friends, who muttered much and savagely of witchcraft, and the list which had been taken down only the night before from Hota's own lips. They demanded to have it made public, and objected to the slow forms of the law. Others, not so much or so immediately interested in the sufferers, were kneeling around, and praying aloud for themselves and their own safety, until the excitement should be so much quelled as to enable Dr. Cotton Mather to be again heard in prayer and exhortation.

And where was Manasseh? What said he? You must remember that the stir of the outcry, the accusation, the appeals of the accused, all seemed to go on at once, amid the buzz and din of the people who had come to worship God, but remained to judge and upbraid their fellow-creature. Till now, Lois had only caught a glimpse of Manasseh, who was apparently trying to push forwards, but whom his mother was holding back with word and action, as Lois knew she would hold him back; for it was not for the first time that she was made aware how carefully her aunt had

always shrouded his decent reputation among his fellow-citizens from the least suspicion of his seasons of excitement and incipient insanity. On such days, when he himself imagined that he heard prophetic voices and saw prophetic visions, his mother would do much to prevent any besides his own family from seeing him ; and now Lois, by a process swifter than reasoning, felt certain, from her one look at his face when she saw it, colourless and deformed by intensity of expression, among a number of others, all simply ruddy and angry, that he was in such a state that his mother would in vain do her utmost to prevent his making himself conspicuous. Whatever force or argument Grace used, it was of no avail. In another moment, he was by Lois's side, stammering with excitement, and giving vague testimony, which would have been of little value in a calm court of justice, and was only oil to the smouldering fire of that audience.

"Away with her to gaol!" "Seek out the witches!" "The sin has spread into all households!" "Satan is in the very midst of us!" "Strike and spare not!" In vain Dr. Cotton Mather raised his voice in loud prayers, in which he assumed the guilt of the accused girl ; no one listened, all were anxious to secure Lois, as if they feared she would vanish from before their very eyes : she, white, trembling, standing quite still in the tight grasp of strange, fierce men, her dilated eyes only wandering a little now and then in search of some pitiful face—some pitiful face that, among all those hundreds, was not to be found. While some fetched cords to bind her, and others, by low questions, suggested new accusations to the distempered brain of Prudence, Manasseh obtained a hearing once more. Addressing Dr. Cotton Mather, he said, evidently anxious to make clear some new argument that had just suggested itself to him : "Sir, in this matter, be she witch or not, the end has been foreshown to me by the spirit of prophecy. Now, reverend sir, if the event be known to the spirit, it must have been foredoomed in the counsels of God. If so, why punish her for doing that in which she had no free-will?"

"Young man," said Dr. Mather, bending down from the pulpit and looking very severely upon Manasseh, "take care! you are trenching on blasphemy."

"I do not care. I say it again. Either Lois Barclay is a witch, or she is not. If she is, it has been foredoomed for her, for I have seen a vision of her death as a condemned witch for many months past—and the voice has told me there was but one escape for her—Lois—the voice you know"—— In his excitement he began to wander a little; but it was touching to see how conscious he was, that by giving way he would lose the thread of the logical argument by which he hoped to prove that Lois ought not to be punished, and with what an effort he wrenched his imagination away from the old ideas, and strove to concentrate all his mind upon the plea that, if Lois was a witch, it had been shown him by prophecy: and, if there was prophecy, there must be foreknowledge; if foreknowledge, no freedom; if no freedom, no exercise of free-will; and, therefore, that Lois was not justly amenable to punishment.

On he went, plunging into heresy, caring not—growing more and more passionate every instant, but directing his passion into keen argument, desperate sarcasm, instead of allowing it to excite his imagination. Even Dr. Mather felt himself on the point of being worsted in the very presence of this congregation, who, but a short half-hour ago, looked upon him as all but infallible. Keep a good heart, Cotton Mather! your opponent's eye begins to glare and flicker with a terrible, yet uncertain, light—his speech grows less coherent, and his arguments are mixed up with wild glimpses at wilder revelations made to himself alone. He has touched on the limits—he has entered the borders—of blasphemy; and, with an awful cry of horror and reprobation, the congregation rise up, as one man, against the blasphemer. Dr. Mather smiled a grim smile; and the people were ready to stone Manasseh, who went on, regardless, talking and raving.

"Stay, stay!" said Grace Hickson—all the decent family shame which prompted her to conceal the mysterious

misfortune of her only son from public knowledge done away with by the sense of the immediate danger to his life. "Touch him not! He knows not what he is saying. The fit is upon him. I tell you the truth before God. My son, my only son, is mad."

They stood aghast at the intelligence. The grave young citizen, who had silently taken his part in life close by them in their daily lives—not mixing much with them, it was true, but looked up to, perhaps, all the more—the student of abstruse books on theology, fit to converse with the most learned ministers that ever came about those parts—was he the same with the man now pouring out wild words to Lois the witch, as if he and she were the only two present? A solution of it all occurred to them. He was another victim. Great was the power of Satan! Through the arts of the devil, that white statue of a girl had mastered the soul of Manasseh Hickson. So the word spread from mouth to mouth. And Grace heard it. It seemed a healing balsam for her shame. With wilful, dishonest blindness, she would not see—not even in her secret heart would she acknowledge—that Manasseh had been strange, and moody, and violent long before the English girl had reached Salem. She even found some specious reason for his attempt at suicide long ago. He was recovering from a fever—and though tolerably well in health, the delirium had not finally left him. But since Lois came, how headstrong he had been at times! how unreasonable! how moody! What a strange delusion was that which he was under, of being bidden by some voice to marry her! How he followed her about, and clung to her, as under some compulsion of affection! And over all reigned the idea that, if he were indeed suffering from being bewitched, he was not mad, and might again assume the honourable position he had held in the congregation and in the town, when the spell by which he was held was destroyed. So Grace yielded to the notion herself, and encouraged it in others, that Lois Barclay had bewitched both Manasseh and Prudence. And the consequence of this

belief was, that Lois was to be tried, with little chance in her favour, to see whether she was a witch or no; and if a witch, whether she would confess, implicate others, repent, and live a life of bitter shame, avoided by all men, and cruelly treated by most; or die, impenitent, hardened, denying her crime upon the gallows.

And so they dragged Lois away from the congregation of Christians to the gaol, to await her trial. I say "dragged her": because, although she was docile enough to have followed them whither they would, she was now so faint as to require extraneous force—poor Lois! who should have been carried and tended lovingly in her state of exhaustion; but, instead, was so detested by the multitude, who looked upon her as an accomplice of Satan in all his evil doings, that they cared no more how they treated her than a careless boy minds how he handles the toad that he is going to throw over the wall.

When Lois came to her full senses, she found herself lying on a short, hard bed in a dark, square room, which she at once knew must be a part of the city gaol. It was about eight feet square; it had stone walls on every side, and a grated opening high above her head, letting in all the light and air that could enter through about a square foot of aperture. It was so lonely, so dark to that poor girl, when she came slowly and painfully out of her long faint. She did so want human help in that struggle which always supervenes after a swoon; when the effort is to clutch at life, and the effort seems too much for the will. She did not at first understand where she was, did not understand how she came to be there; nor did she care to understand. Her physical instinct was to lie still and let the hurrying pulses have time to calm. So she shut her eyes once more. Slowly, slowly the recollection of the scene in the meeting-house shaped itself into a kind of picture before her. She saw within her eyelids, as it were, that sea of loathing faces all turned towards her, as towards something unclean and hateful. And you must remember, you who in the

nineteenth century read this account, that witchcraft was a real terrible sin to her, Lois Barclay, two hundred years ago. The look on their faces, stamped on heart and brain, excited in her a sort of strange sympathy. Could it, O God!—could it be true, that Satan had obtained the terrific power over her and her will of which she had heard and read? Could she indeed be possessed by a demon and be indeed a witch, and yet till now have been unconscious of it? And her excited imagination recalled, with singular vividness, all she had ever heard on the subject—the horrible midnight sacrament, the very presence and power of Satan. Then, remembering every angry thought against her neighbour, against the impertinences of Prudence, against the overbearing authority of her aunt, against the persevering crazy suit of Manasseh, her indignation—only that morning, but such ages off in real time—at Faith's injustice: oh, could such evil thoughts have had devilish power given to them by the father of evil, and, all unconsciously to herself, have gone forth as active curses into the world? And so the ideas went on careering wildly through the poor girl's brain, the girl thrown inward upon herself. At length, the sting of her imagination forced her to start up impatiently. What was this? A weight of iron on her legs—a weight stated afterwards, by the gaoler of Salem prison, to have been "not more than eight pounds." It was well for Lois it was a tangible ill, bringing her back from the wild, illimitable desert in which her imagination was wandering. She took hold of the iron, and saw her torn stocking, her bruised ankle, and began to cry pitifully, out of strange compassion with herself. They feared, then, that even in that cell she would find a way to escape! Why, the utter, ridiculous impossibility of the thing convinced her of her own innocence and ignorance of all supernatural power; and the heavy iron brought her strangely round from the delusions that seemed to be gathering about her.

No! she never could fly out of that deep dungeon; there was no escape, natural or supernatural, for her, unless by

man's mercy. And what was man's mercy in such times of panic? Lois knew that it was nothing; instinct, more than reason, taught her that panic calls out cowardice, and cowardice cruelty. Yet she cried, cried freely, and for the first time, when she found herself ironed and chained. It seemed so cruel, so much as if her fellow-creatures had really learnt to hate and dread her—her, who had had a few angry thoughts, which God forgive! but whose thoughts had never gone into words, far less into actions. Why, even now she could love all the household at home, if they would but let her; yes, even yet, though she felt that it was the open accusation of Prudence and the withheld justifications of her aunt and Faith that had brought her to her present strait. Would they ever come and see her? Would kinder thoughts of her—who had shared their daily bread for months and months—bring them to see her, and ask her whether it were really she who had brought on the illness of Prudence, the derangement of Manasseh's mind?

No one came. Bread and water were pushed in by some one, who hastily locked and unlocked the door, and cared not to see if he put them within his prisoner's reach, or perhaps thought that that physical fact mattered little to a witch. It was long before Lois could reach them; and she had something of the natural hunger of youth left in her still, which prompted her, lying her length on the floor, to weary herself with efforts to obtain the bread. After she had eaten some of it, the day began to wane, and she thought she would lay her down and try to sleep. But before she did so, the gaoler heard her singing the Evening Hymn—

> "Glory to Thee, my God, this night,
> For all the blessings of the light!"

And a dull thought came into his dull mind, that she was thankful for few blessings, if she could tune up her voice to sing praises after this day of what, if she were a witch, was shameful detection in abominable practices, and if not—— Well, his mind stopped short at this point in his

wondering contemplation. Lois knelt down and said the Lord's Prayer, pausing just a little before one clause, that she might be sure that in her heart of hearts she did forgive. Then she looked at her ankle, and the tears came into her eyes once again; but not so much because she was hurt, as because men must have hated her so bitterly before they could have treated her thus. Then she lay down and fell asleep.

The next day, she was led before Mr. Hathorn and Mr. Curwin, justices of Salem, to be accused legally and publicly of witchcraft. Others were with her, under the same charge. And when the prisoners were brought in, they were cried out at by the abhorrent crowd. The two Tappaus, Prudence, and one or two other girls of the same age were there, in the character of victims of the spells of the accused. The prisoners were placed about seven or eight feet from the justices, and the accusers between the justices and them; the former were then ordered to stand right before the justices. All this Lois did at their bidding, with something of the wondering docility of a child, but not with any hope of softening the hard, stony look of detestation that was on all the countenances around her, save those that were distorted by more passionate anger. Then an officer was bidden to hold each of her hands, and Justice Hathorn bade her keep her eyes continually fixed on him, for this reason—which, however, was not told to her—lest, if she looked on Prudence, the girl might either fall into a fit, or cry out that she was suddenly or violently hurt. If any heart could have been touched in that cruel multitude, they would have felt some compassion for the sweet young face of the English girl, trying so meekly to do all that she was ordered, her face quite white, yet so full of sad gentleness, her grey eyes, a little dilated by the very solemnity of her position, fixed with the intent look of innocent maidenhood on the stern face of Justice Hathorn. And thus they stood in silence, one breathless minute. Then they were bidden to say the Lord's Prayer. Lois went through it as if alone in her cell; but, as she had done alone in her cell the night before, she

made a little pause, before the prayer to be forgiven as she forgave. And at this instant of hesitation—as if they had been on the watch for it—they all cried out upon her for a witch; and, when the clamour ended, the justices bade Prudence Hickson come forward. Then Lois turned a little to one side, wishing to see at least one familiar face; but, when her eyes fell upon Prudence, the girl stood stock-still, and answered no questions, nor spoke a word, and the justices declared that she was struck dumb by witchcraft. Then some behind took Prudence under the arms, and would have forced her forwards to touch Lois, possibly esteeming that as a cure for her being bewitched. But Prudence had hardly been made to take three steps, before she struggled out of their arms and fell down writhing, as in a fit, calling out with shrieks, and entreating Lois to help her, and save her from her torment. Then all the girls began "to tumble down like swine" (to use the words of an eye-witness) and to cry out upon Lois and her fellow-prisoners. These last were now ordered to stand with their hands stretched out, it being imagined that, if the bodies of the witches were arranged in the form of a cross, they would lose their evil power. By-and-by, Lois felt her strength going, from the unwonted fatigue of such a position, which she had borne patiently until the pain and weariness had forced both tears and sweat down her face; and she asked, in a low, plaintive voice, if she might not rest her head for a few moments against the wooden partition. But Justice Hathorn told her she had strength enough to torment others, and should have strength enough to stand. She sighed a little, and bore on, the clamour against her and the other accused increasing every moment; the only way she could keep herself from utterly losing consciousness was by distracting herself from present pain and danger, and saying to herself verses of the Psalms as she could remember them, expressive of trust in God. At length, she was ordered back to gaol, and dimly understood that she and others were sentenced to be hanged for witchcraft. Many people now

looked eagerly at Lois, to see if she would weep at this doom. If she had had strength to cry, it might—it was just possible that it might—have been considered a plea in her favour, for witches could not shed tears; but she was too exhausted and dead. All she wanted was to lie down once more on her prison-bed, out of the reach of men's cries of abhorrence, and out of shot of their cruel eyes. So they led her back to prison, speechless and tearless.

But rest gave her back her power of thought and suffering. Was it indeed true that she was to die? She, Lois Barclay, only eighteen, so well, so young, so full of love and hope as she had been, till but these few days past! What would they think of it at home—real, dear home at Barford, in England? There they had loved her; there she had gone about singing and rejoicing, all the day long, in the pleasant meadows by the Avon side. Oh, why did father and mother die, and leave her their bidding to come here to this cruel New England shore, where no one had wanted her, no one had cared for her, and where now they were going to put her to a shameful death as a witch? And there would be no one to send kindly messages by, to those she should never see more. Never more! Young Lucy was living, and joyful—probably thinking of her, and of his declared intention of coming to fetch her home to be his wife this very spring. Possibly he had forgotten her; no one knew. A week before, she would have been indignant at her own distrust in thinking for a minute that he could forget. Now, she doubted all men's goodness for a time; for those around her were deadly, and cruel, and relentless.

Then she turned round, and beat herself with angry blows (to speak in images) for ever doubting her lover. Oh! if she were but with him! Oh! if she might but be with him! He would not let her die, but would hide her in his bosom from the wrath of this people, and carry her back to the old home at Barford. And he might even now be sailing on the wide blue sea, coming nearer, nearer every moment; and yet be too late after all.

So the thoughts chased each other through her head all that feverish night, till she clung almost deliriously to life, and wildly prayed that she might not die; at least, not just yet, and she so young!

Pastor Tappau and certain elders roused her up from a heavy sleep, late on the morning of the following day. All night long, she had trembled and cried, till morning light had come peering in through the square grating up above. It soothed her, and she fell asleep, to be awakened, as I have said, by Pastor Tappau.

"Arise!" said he, scrupling to touch her, from his superstitious idea of her evil powers. "It is noonday."

"Where am I?" said she, bewildered at this unusual wakening and the array of severe faces, all gazing upon her with reprobation.

"You are in Salem gaol, condemned for a witch."

"Alas! I had forgotten for an instant," said she, dropping her head upon her breast.

"She has been out on a devilish ride all night long, doubtless, and is weary and perplexed this morning," whispered one in so low a voice that he did not think she could hear; but she lifted up her eyes, and looked at him, with mute reproach.

"We are come," said Pastor Tappau, "to exhort you to confess your great and manifold sin."

"My great and manifold sin!" repeated Lois to herself, shaking her head.

"Yea, your sin of witchcraft. If you will confess, there may yet be balm in Gilead."

One of the elders, struck with pity at the young girl's wan, shrunken look, said that if she confessed and repented, and did penance, possibly her life might yet be spared.

A sudden flash of light came into her sunk, dulled eye. Might she yet live? Was it yet in her power? Why, no one knew how soon Ralph Lucy might be here, to take her away for ever into the peace of a new home! Life! Oh, then, all hope was not over—perhaps she might still live,

and not die. Yet the truth came once more out of her lips, almost without exercise of her will.

"I am not a witch," she said.

Then Pastor Tappau blindfolded her, all unresisting, but with languid wonder in her heart as to what was to come next. She heard people enter the dungeon softly, and heard whispering voices; then her hands were lifted up and made to touch some one near, and in an instant she heard a noise of struggling, and the well-known voice of Prudence shrieking out in one of her hysterical fits, and screaming to be taken away and out of that place. It seemed to Lois as if some of her judges must have doubted of her guilt, and demanded yet another test. She sat down heavily on her bed, thinking she must be in a horrible dream, so compassed about with dangers and enemies did she seem. Those in the dungeon—and, by the oppression of the air, she perceived that there were many—kept on eager talking in low voices. She did not try to make out the sense of the fragments of sentences that reached her dulled brain, till, all at once, a word or two made her understand they were discussing the desirableness of applying the whip or the torture to make her confess, and reveal by what means the spell she had cast upon those whom she had bewitched could be dissolved. A thrill of affright ran through her; and she cried out beseechingly—

"I beg you, sirs, for God's mercy sake, that you do not use such awful means. I may say anything—nay, I may accuse any one—if I am subjected to such torment as I have heard tell about. For I am but a young girl, and not very brave, or very good, as some are."

It touched the hearts of one or two to see her standing there; the tears streaming down from below the coarse handkerchief, tightly bound over her eyes; the clanking chain fastening the heavy weight to the slight ankle; the two hands held together, as if to keep down a convulsive motion.

"Look!" said one of these. "She is weeping. They say no witch can weep tears."

But another scoffed at this test, and bade the first remember how those of her own family, the Hicksons even, bore witness against her.

Once more, she was bidden to confess. The charges, esteemed by all men (as they said) to have been proven against her, were read over to her, with all the testimony borne against her in proof thereof. They told her that, considering the godly family to which she belonged, it had been decided by the magistrates and ministers of Salem that she should have her life spared, if she would own her guilt, make reparation, and submit to penance; but that, if not, she and others convicted of witchcraft along with her, were to be hung in Salem market-place on the next Thursday morning (Thursday being market-day). And when they had thus spoken, they waited silently for her answer. It was a minute or two before she spoke. She had sat down again upon the bed meanwhile; for indeed she was very weak. She asked, "May I have this handkerchief unbound from my eyes; for indeed, sirs, it hurts me?"

The occasion for which she was blindfolded being over, the bandage was taken off, and she was allowed to see. She looked pitifully at the stern faces around her, in grim suspense as to what her answer would be. Then she spoke—

"Sirs, I must choose death with a quiet conscience, rather than life to be gained by a lie. I am not a witch. I know not hardly what you mean, when you say I am. I have done many, many things very wrong in my life; but I think God will forgive me them for my Saviour's sake."

"Take not His name on your wicked lips," said Pastor Tappau, enraged at her resolution of not confessing, and scarcely able to keep himself from striking her. She saw the desire he had, and shrank away in timid fear. Then Justice Hathorn solemnly read the legal condemnation of Lois Barclay to death by hanging, as a convicted witch. She murmured something which nobody heard fully, but which sounded like a prayer for pity and compassion on her tender years and friendless estate. Then they left her to all

the horrors of that solitary, loathsome dungeon, and the strange terror of approaching death.

Outside the prison-walls, the dread of the witches, and the excitement against witchcraft, grew with fearful rapidity. Numbers of women, and men, too, were accused, no matter what their station of life and their former character had been. On the other side, it is alleged that upwards of fifty persons were grievously vexed by the devil, and those to whom he had imparted of his power for vile and wicked considerations. How much of malice—distinct, unmistakable, personal malice—was mixed up with these accusations, no one can now tell. The dire statistics of this time tell us, that fifty-five escaped death by confessing themselves guilty; one hundred and fifty were in prison; more than two hundred accused; and upwards of twenty suffered death, among whom was the minister I have called Nolan, who was traditionally esteemed to have suffered through hatred of his co-pastor. One old man, scorning the accusation, and refusing to plead at his trial, was, according to the law, pressed to death for his contumacy. Nay, even dogs were accused of witchcraft, suffered the legal penalties, and are recorded among the subjects of capital punishment. One young man found means to effect his mother's escape from confinement, fled with her on horseback, and secreted her in the Blueberry Swamp, not far from Taplay's Brook, in the Great Pasture; he concealed her here in a wigwam which he built for her shelter, provided her with food and clothing, and comforted and sustained her, until after the delusion had passed away. The poor creature must, however, have suffered dreadfully; for one of her arms was fractured in the all but desperate effort of getting her out of prison.

But there was no one to try and save Lois. Grace Hickson would fain have ignored her altogether. Such a taint did witchcraft bring upon a whole family, that generations of blameless life were not at that day esteemed sufficient to wash it out. Besides, you must remember that Grace, along with most people of her time, believed most firmly in

the reality of the crime of witchcraft. Poor, forsaken Lois believed in it herself; and it added to her terror, for the gaoler, in an unusually communicative mood, told her that nearly every cell was now full of witches, and it was possible he might have to put one, if more came, in with her. Lois knew that she was no witch herself; but not the less did she believe that the crime was abroad, and largely shared in by evil-minded persons who had chosen to give up their souls to Satan; and she shuddered with terror at what the gaoler said, and would have asked him to spare her this companionship, if it were possible. But, somehow, her senses were leaving her; and she could not remember the right words in which to form her request, until he had left the place.

The only person who yearned after Lois—who would have befriended her if he could—was Manasseh, poor, mad Manasseh. But he was so wild and outrageous in his talk, that it was all his mother could do to keep his state concealed from public observation. She had for this purpose given him a sleeping potion; and, while he lay heavy and inert under the influence of the poppy-tea, his mother bound him with cords to the ponderous, antique bed in which he slept. She looked broken-hearted, while she did this office and thus acknowledged the degradation of her first-born—him of whom she had ever been so proud.

Late that evening, Grace Hickson stood in Lois's cell, hooded and cloaked up to her eyes. Lois was sitting quite still, playing idly with a bit of string which one of the magistrates had dropped out of his pocket that morning. Her aunt was standing by her for an instant or two in silence, before Lois seemed aware of her presence. Suddenly, she looked up and uttered a little cry, shrinking away from the dark figure. Then, as if her cry had loosened Grace's tongue, she began—

"Lois Barclay, did I ever do you any harm?" Grace did not know how often her want of loving-kindness had pierced the tender heart of the stranger under her roof; nor

did Lois remember it against her now. Instead, Lois's memory was filled with grateful thoughts of how much that might have been left undone, by a less conscientious person, her aunt had done for her; and she half-stretched out her arms as to a friend in that desolate place, while she answered—

"Oh no, no! you were very good! very kind!"

But Grace stood immovable.

"I did you no harm, although I never rightly knew why you came to us."

"I was sent by my mother on her death-bed," moaned Lois, covering her face. It grew darker every instant. Her aunt stood, still and silent.

"Did any of mine ever wrong you?" she asked, after a time.

"No, no; never, till Prudence said—— Oh, aunt, do you think I am a witch?" And now Lois was standing up, holding by Grace's cloak, and trying to read her face. Grace drew herself, ever so little, away from the girl, whom she dreaded, and yet sought to propitiate.

"Wiser than I, godlier than I, have said it. But, oh, Lois, Lois! he was my first-born. Loose him from the demon, for the sake of Him whose name I dare not name in this terrible building, filled with them who have renounced the hopes of their baptism; loose Manasseh from his awful state, if ever I or mine did you a kindness."

"You ask me for Christ's sake," said Lois. "I can name that holy name—for oh, aunt! indeed, and in holy truth, I am no witch! and yet I am to die—to be hanged! Aunt, do not let them kill me! I am so young, and I never did any one any harm that I know of."

"Hush! for very shame! This afternoon I have bound my first-born with strong cords, to keep him from doing himself or us a mischief—he is so frenzied. Lois Barclay, look here!" and Grace knelt down at her niece's feet, and joined her hands, as if in prayer. "I am a proud woman, God forgive me! and I never thought to kneel to any save

to Him. And now I kneel at your feet, to pray you to release my children, more especially my son Manasseh, from the spells you have put upon them. Lois, hearken to me, and I will pray to the Almighty for you, if yet there may be mercy."

"I cannot do it; I never did you or yours any wrong. How can I undo it? How can I?" And she wrung her hands, in intensity of conviction of the inutility of aught she could do.

Here Grace got up, slowly, stiffly, and sternly. She stood aloof from the chained girl, in the remote corner of the prison-cell near the door, ready to make her escape as soon as she had cursed the witch, who would not, or could not, undo the evil she had wrought. Grace lifted up her right hand, and held it up on high, as she doomed Lois to be accursed for ever, for her deadly sin, and her want of mercy even at this final hour. And, lastly, she summoned her to meet her at the judgment-seat, and answer for this deadly injury, done to both souls and bodies of those who had taken her in, and received her when she came to them an orphan and a stranger.

Until this last summons, Lois had stood as one who hears her sentence and can say nothing against it, for she knows all would be in vain. But she raised her head when she heard her aunt speak of the judgment-seat, and at the end of Grace's speech she, too, lifted up her right hand, as if solemnly pledging herself by that action, and replied—

"Aunt! I will meet you there. And there you will know my innocence of this deadly thing. God have mercy on you and yours!"

Her calm voice maddened Grace; and, making a gesture as if she plucked up a handful of dust off the floor and threw it at Lois, she cried—

"Witch! witch! ask mercy for thyself—I need not your prayers. Witches' prayers are read backwards. I spit at thee, and defy thee!" And so she went away.

Lois sat moaning that whole night through. "God comfort

me! God strengthen me!" was all she could remember to say. She just felt that want, nothing more—all other fears and wants seemed dead within her. And, when the gaoler brought in her breakfast the next morning, he reported her as "gone silly"; for, indeed, she did not seem to know him, but kept rocking herself to and fro, and whispering softly to herself, smiling a little from time to time.

But God did comfort her, and strengthen her too. Late on that Wednesday afternoon they thrust another "witch" into her cell, bidding the two, with opprobrious words, keep company together. The new-comer fell prostrate with the push given her from without; and Lois, not recognising anything but an old ragged woman, lying helpless on her face on the ground, lifted her up; and lo! it was Nattee—dirty, filthy indeed, mud-pelted, stone-bruised, beaten, and all astray in her wits with the treatment she had received from the mob outside. Lois held her in her arms, and softly wiped the old brown wrinkled face with her apron, crying over it, as she had hardly yet cried over her own sorrows. For hours she tended the old Indian woman—tended her bodily woes; and, as the poor scattered senses of the savage creature came slowly back, Lois gathered her infinite dread of the morrow, when she, too, as well as Lois, was to be led out to die, in face of all that infuriated crowd. Lois sought in her own mind for some source of comfort for the old woman, who shook like one in the shaking-palsy at the dread of death—and such a death!

When all was quiet through the prison, in the deep dead midnight, the gaoler outside the door heard Lois telling, as if to a young child, the marvellous and sorrowful story of One who died on the cross for us and for our sakes. As long as she spoke, the Indian woman's terror seemed lulled; but, the instant she paused for weariness, Nattee cried out afresh, as if some wild beast were following her close through the dense forests in which she had dwelt in her youth. And then Lois went on, saying all the blessed words she could remember, and comforting the helpless Indian woman with

the sense of the presence of a Heavenly Friend. And, in comforting her, Lois was comforted; in strengthening her, Lois was strengthened.

The morning came, and the summons to come forth and die came. They who entered the cell found Lois asleep, her face resting on the slumbering old woman, whose head she still held in her lap. She did not seem clearly to recognise where she was, when she awakened; the "silly" look had returned to her wan face; all she appeared to know was that, somehow or another, through some peril or another, she had to protect the poor Indian woman. She smiled faintly, when she saw the bright light of the April day; and put her arm round Nattee, and tried to keep the Indian quiet with hushing, soothing words of broken meaning, and holy fragments of the Psalms. Nattee tightened her hold upon Lois, as they drew near the gallows, and the outrageous crowd below began to hoot and yell. Lois redoubled her efforts to calm and encourage Nattee, apparently unconscious that any of the opprobrium, the hootings, the stones, the mud, was directed towards her herself. But, when they took Nattee from her arms, and led her out to suffer first, Lois seemed all at once to recover her sense of the present terror. She gazed wildly around, stretched out her arms as if to some person in the distance, who was yet visible to her, and cried out once, with a voice that thrilled through all who heard it, "Mother!" Directly afterwards, the body of Lois the Witch swung in the air; and every one stood with hushed breath, with a sudden wonder, like a fear of deadly crime, fallen upon them.

The stillness and the silence were broken by one crazed and mad, who came rushing up the steps of the ladder, and caught Lois's body in his arms, and kissed her lips with wild passion. And then, as if it were true what the people believed, that he was possessed by a demon, he sprang down, and rushed through the crowd, out of the bounds of the city, and into the dark dense forest; and Manasseh Hickson was no more seen of Christian man.

The people of Salem had awakened from their frightful delusion before the autumn, when Captain Holdernesse and Ralph Lucy came to find out Lois, and bring her home to peaceful Barford, in the pleasant country of England. Instead, they led them to the grassy grave where she lay at rest, done to death by mistaken men. Ralph Lucy shook the dust off his feet in quitting Salem, with a heavy, heavy heart, and lived a bachelor all his life long for her sake.

Long years afterwards, Captain Holdernesse sought him out, to tell him some news that he thought might interest the grave miller of the Avon-side. Captain Holdernesse told him, that in the previous year—it was then 1713—the sentence of excommunication against the witches of Salem was ordered, in godly sacramental meeting of the church, to be erased and blotted out, and that those who met together for this purpose "humbly requested the merciful God would pardon whatsoever sin, error, or mistake was in the application of justice, through our merciful High Priest, who knoweth how to have compassion on the ignorant, and those that are out of the way." He also said, that Prudence Hickson—now woman grown—had made a most touching and pungent declaration of sorrow and repentance before the whole church, for the false and mistaken testimony she had given in several instances, among which she particularly mentioned that of her cousin Lois Barclay. To all which Ralph Lucy only answered—

"No repentance of theirs can bring her back to life."

Then Captain Holdernesse took out a paper and read the following humble and solemn declaration of regret on the part of those who signed it, among whom Grace Hickson was one:—

"We, whose names are undersigned, being, in the year 1692, called to serve as jurors in the court of Salem, on trial of many who were by some suspected guilty of doing acts of witchcraft upon the bodies of sundry persons: we confess that we ourselves were not capable to understand, nor able to withstand, the mysterious delusions of the powers of

darkness, and prince of the air, but were, for want of knowledge in ourselves, and better information from others, prevailed with to take up with such evidence against the accused, as, on further consideration, and better information, we justly fear was insufficient for the touching the lives of any (Deut. xvii. 6), whereby we feel we have been instrumental, with others, though ignorantly and unwittingly, to bring upon ourselves and this people of the Lord the guilt of innocent blood; which sin, the Lord saith in Scripture, he would not pardon (2 Kings xxiv. 4), that is, we suppose, in regard of his temporal judgments. We do, therefore, signify to all in general (and to the surviving sufferers in special) our deep sense of, and sorrow for, our errors, in acting on such evidence to the condemning of any person; and do hereby declare, that we justly fear that we were sadly deluded and mistaken, for which we are much disquieted and distressed in our minds, and do therefore humbly beg forgiveness, first of God for Christ's sake, for this our error; and pray that God would not impute the guilt of it to ourselves nor others; and we also pray that we may be considered candidly and aright by the living sufferers, as being then under the power of a strong and general delusion, utterly unacquainted with, and not experienced in, matters of that nature.

"We do heartily ask forgiveness of you all, whom we have justly offended; and do declare, according to our present minds, we would none of us do such things again on such grounds for the whole world; praying you to accept of this in way of satisfaction for our offence, and that you would bless the inheritance of the Lord, that he may be entreated for the land.

"Foreman, THOMAS FISK, &c."

To the reading of this paper Ralph Lucy made no reply save this, even more gloomily than before—

"All their repentance will avail nothing to my Lois, nor will it bring back her life."

Then Captain Holdernesse spoke once more, and said

that on the day of the general fast, appointed to be held all through New England, when the meeting-houses were crowded, an old, old man, with white hair, had stood up in the place in which he was accustomed to worship, and had handed up into the pulpit a written confession, which he had once or twice essayed to read for himself, acknowledging his great and grievous error in the matter of the witches of Salem, and praying for the forgiveness of God and of His people, ending with an entreaty that all then present would join with him in prayer that his past conduct might not bring down the displeasure of the Most High upon his country, his family, or himself. That old man, who was no other than Justice Sewall, remained standing all the time that his confession was read; and at the end he said, "The good and gracious God be pleased to save New England and me and my family!" And then it came out that, for years past, Judge Sewall had set apart a day for humiliation and prayer, to keep fresh in his mind a sense of repentance and sorrow for the part he had borne in these trials, and that this solemn anniversary he was pledged to keep as long as he lived, to show his feeling of deep humiliation.

Ralph Lucy's voice trembled as he spoke: "All this will not bring my Lois to life again, or give me back the hope of my youth."

But—as Captain Holdernesse shook his head (for what word could he say, or how dispute what was so evidently true?)—Ralph added, "What is the day, know you, that this justice has set apart?"

"The twenty-ninth of April."

"Then, on that day, will I, here at Barford in England, join my prayers as long as I live with the repentant judge, that his sin may be blotted out and no more had in remembrance. She would have willed it so."

THE CROOKED BRANCH

Not many years after the beginning of this century, a worthy couple of the name of Huntroyd occupied a small farm in the North Riding of Yorkshire. They had married late in life, although they were very young when they first began to "keep company" with each other. Nathan Huntroyd had been farm-servant to Hester Rose's father, and had made up to her at a time when her parents thought she might do better; and so, without much consultation of her feelings, they had dismissed Nathan in somewhat cavalier fashion. He had drifted far away from his former connections, when an uncle of his died, leaving Nathan—by this time upwards of forty years of age—enough money to stock a small farm, and yet have something over, to put in the bank against bad times. One of the consequences of this bequest was, that Nathan was looking out for a wife and housekeeper, in a kind of discreet and leisurely way, when one day he heard that his old love, Hester, was not married and flourishing, as he had always supposed her to be, but a poor maid-of-all-work, in the town of Ripon. For her father had had a succession of misfortunes, which had brought him in his old age to the workhouse; her mother was dead; her only brother struggling to bring up a large family; and Hester herself a hard-working, homely-looking (at thirty-seven) servant. Nathan had a kind of growling satisfaction (which only lasted a minute or two, however) in hearing of these turns of fortune's wheel. He did not make many intelligible remarks to his informant, and to no one else did he say a word. But, a few days afterwards, he

presented himself, dressed in his Sunday best, at Mrs. Thompson's back-door in Ripon.

Hester stood there, in answer to the good sound knock his good sound oak-stick made: she, with the light full upon her, he in shadow. For a moment there was silence. He was scanning the face and figure of his old love, for twenty years unseen. The comely beauty of youth had faded away entirely; she was, as I have said, homely-looking, plain-featured, but with a clean skin, and pleasant frank eyes. Her figure was no longer round, but tidily draped in a blue and white bed-gown, tied round her waist by her white apron-strings, and her short red linsey petticoat showed her tidy feet and ankles. Her former lover fell into no ecstasies. He simply said to himself, "She'll do"; and forthwith began upon his business.

"Hester, thou dost not mind me. I am Nathan, as thy father turned off at a minute's notice, for thinking of thee for a wife, twenty year come Michaelmas next. I have not thought much upon matrimony since. But Uncle Ben has died, leaving me a small matter in the bank; and I have taken Nab-End Farm, and put in a bit of stock, and shall want a missus to see after it. Wilt like to come? I'll not mislead thee. It's dairy, and it might have been arable. But arable takes more horses nor it suited me to buy, and I'd the offer of a tidy lot of kine. That's all. If thou'll have me, I'll come for thee as soon as the hay is gotten in."

Hester only said, "Come in, and sit thee down."

He came in, and sat down. For a time, she took no more notice of him than of his stick, bustling about to get dinner ready for the family whom she served. He meanwhile watched her brisk, sharp movements, and repeated to himself, "She'll do!" After about twenty minutes of silence thus employed, he got up, saying—

"Well, Hester, I'm going. When shall I come back again?"

"Please thysel', and thou'll please me," said Hester, in a tone that she tried to make light and indifferent; but he saw

that her colour came and went, and that she trembled while she moved about. In another moment Hester was soundly kissed; but, when she looked round to scold the middle-aged farmer, he appeared so entirely composed that she hesitated. He said—

"I have pleased mysel', and thee too, I hope. Is it a month's wage, and a month's warning? To-day is the eighth. July eighth is our wedding-day. I have no time to spend a-wooing before then, and wedding must na take long. Two days is enough to throw away, at our time o' life."

It was like a dream; but Hester resolved not to think more about it till her work was done. And when all was cleaned up for the evening, she went and gave her mistress warning, telling her all the history of her life in a very few words. That day month she was married from Mrs. Thompson's house.

The issue of the marriage was one boy, Benjamin. A few years after his birth, Hester's brother died at Leeds, leaving ten or twelve children. Hester sorrowed bitterly over this loss; and Nathan showed her much quiet sympathy, although he could not but remember that Jack Rose had added insult to the bitterness of his youth. He helped his wife to make ready to go by the waggon to Leeds. He made light of the household difficulties, which came thronging into her mind after all was fixed for her departure. He filled her purse, that she might have wherewithal to alleviate the immediate wants of her brother's family. And, as she was leaving, he ran after the waggon. "Stop, stop!" he cried. "Hetty, if thou wilt—if it wunnot be too much for thee—bring back one of Jack's wenches for company, like. We've enough and to spare; and a lass will make the house winsome, as a man may say."

The waggon moved on; while Hester had such a silent swelling of gratitude in her heart, as was both thanks to her husband and thanksgiving to God.

And that was the way that little Bessy Rose came to be an inmate of the Nab's-End Farm.

Virtue met with its own reward in this instance, and in a clear and tangible shape, too; which need not delude people in general into thinking that such is the usual nature of virtue's rewards! Bessy grew up a bright affectionate, active girl; a daily comfort to her uncle and aunt. She was so much a darling in the household that they even thought her worthy of their only son Benjamin, who was perfection in their eyes. It is not often the case that two plain, homely people have a child of uncommon beauty; but it is so sometimes, and Benjamin Huntroyd was one of these exceptional cases. The hard-working, labour-and-care-marked farmer, and the mother, who could never have been more than tolerably comely in her best days, produced a boy who might have been an earl's son for grace and beauty. Even the hunting squires of the neighbourhood reined up their horses to admire him, as he opened the gates for them. He had no shyness, he was so accustomed from his earliest years to admiration from strangers and adoration from his parents. As for Bessy Rose, he ruled imperiously over her heart from the time she first set eyes on him. And, as she grew older, she grew on in loving, persuading herself that what her uncle and aunt loved so dearly it was her duty to love dearest of all. At every unconscious symptom of the young girl's love for her cousin, his parents smiled and winked: all was going on as they wished; no need to go far a-field for Benjamin's wife. The household could go on as it was now; Nathan and Hester sinking into the rest of years, and relinquishing care and authority to those dear ones, who, in process of time, might bring other dear ones to share their love.

But Benjamin took it all very coolly. He had been sent to a day-school in the neighbouring town—a grammar-school in the high state of neglect in which the majority of such schools were thirty years ago. Neither his father nor his mother knew much of learning. All they knew (and that directed their choice of a school) was that they could not, by any possibility, part with their darling to a boarding-

school; that some schooling he must have, and that Squire Pollard's son went to Highminster Grammar School. Squire Pollard's son, and many another son destined to make his parents' hearts ache, went to this school. If it had not been so utterly bad a place of education, the simple farmer and his wife might have found it out sooner. But not only did the pupils there learn vice, they also learnt deceit. Benjamin was naturally too clever to remain a dunce; or else, if he had chosen so to be, there was nothing in Highminster Grammar School to hinder his being a dunce of the first water. But, to all appearance, he grew clever and gentleman-like. His father and mother were even proud of his airs and graces, when he came home for the holidays; taking them for proofs of his refinement, although the practical effect of such refinement was to make him express his contempt for his parents' homely ways and simple ignorance. By the time he was eighteen, an articled clerk in an attorney's office at Highminster,—for he had quite declined becoming a "mere clod-hopper," that is to say, a hard-working, honest farmer like his father—Bessy Rose was the only person who was dissatisfied with him. The little girl of fourteen instinctively felt there was something wrong about him. Alas! two years more, and the girl of sixteen worshipped his very shadow, and would not see that aught could be wrong with one so soft-spoken, so handsome, so kind as Cousin Benjamin. For Benjamin had discovered that the way to cajole his parents out of money for every indulgence he fancied, was to pretend to forward their innocent scheme, and make love to his pretty cousin, Bessy Rose. He cared just enough for her to make this work of necessity not disagreeable at the time he was performing it. But he found it tiresome to remember her little claims upon him, when she was no longer present. The letters he had promised her during his weekly absence at Highminster, the trifling commissions she had asked him to do for her, were all considered in the light of troubles; and, even when he was with her, he resented the inquiries she made as to his

mode of passing his time, or what female acquaintances he had in Highminster.

When his apprenticeship was ended, nothing would serve him but that he must go up to London for a year or two. Poor Farmer Huntroyd was beginning to repent of his ambition of making his son Benjamin a gentleman. But it was too late to repine now. Both father and mother felt this; and, however sorrowful they might be, they were silent, neither demurring nor assenting to Benjamin's proposition when first he made it. But Bessy, through her tears, noticed that both her uncle and aunt seemed unusually tired that night, and sat hand-in-hand on the fireside settle, idly gazing into the bright flame, as if they saw in it pictures of what they had once hoped their lives would have been. Bessy rattled about among the supper-things, as she put them away after Benjamin's departure, making more noise than usual—as if noise and bustle was what she needed to keep her from bursting out crying—and, having at one keen glance taken in the position and looks of Nathan and Hester, she avoided looking in that direction again, for fear the sight of their wistful faces should make her own tears overflow.

"Sit thee down, lass—sit thee down! Bring the creepie-stool to the fireside, and let's have a bit of talk over the lad's plans," said Nathan, at last rousing himself to speak. Bessy came and sat down in front of the fire, and threw her apron over her face, as she rested her head on both hands. Nathan felt as if it was a chance which of the two women burst out crying first. So he thought he would speak, in hopes of keeping off the infection of tears.

"Didst ever hear of this mad plan afore, Bessy?"

"No, never!" Her voice came muffled and changed from under her apron. Hester felt as if the tone, both of question and answer, implied blame; and this she could not bear.

"We should ha' looked to it when we bound him; for of necessity it would ha' come to this. There's examins, and

catechizes, and I dunno what all for him to be put through in London. It's not his fault."

"Which on us said it were?" asked Nathan, rather put out. "Tho', for that matter, a few weeks would carry him over the mire, and make him as good a lawyer as any judge among 'em. Oud Lawson the attorney told me that, in a talk I had wi' him a bit sin. Na, na! it's the lad's own hankering after London that makes him want for to stay there for a year, let alone two."

Nathan shook his head.

"And if it be his own hankering," said Bessy, putting down her apron, her face all flame, and her eyes swollen up, "I dunnot see harm in it. Lads aren't like lasses, to be teed to their own fireside like th' crook yonder. It's fitting for a young man to go abroad and see the world, afore he settles down."

Hester's hand sought Bessy's; and the two women sat in sympathetic defiance of any blame that should be thrown on the beloved absent. Nathan only said—

"Nay, wench, dunnot wax up so; whatten's done's done; and worse, it's my doing. I mun needs make my bairn a gentleman; and we mun pay for it."

"Dear uncle! he wunna spend much, I'll answer for it; and I'll scrimp and save i' the house, to make it good."

"Wench!" said Nathan solemnly, "it were not paying in cash I were speaking on: it were paying in heart's care, and heaviness of soul. Lunnon is a place where the devil keeps court as well as King George; and my poor chap has more nor once welly fallen into his clutches here. I dunno what he'll do, when he gets close within sniff of him."

"Don't let him go, father!" said Hester, for the first time taking this view. Hitherto she had only thought of her own grief at parting with him. "Father, if you think so, keep him here, safe under your own eye!"

"Nay!" said Nathan, "he's past time o' life for that. Why, there's not one on us knows where he is at this present time, and he not gone out of our sight an hour.

He's too big to be put back i' th' go-cart, mother, or to keep within doors, with the chair turned bottom-upwards."

"I wish he were a wee bairn lying in my arms again! It were a sore day when I weaned him; and I think life's been gettin' sorer and sorer at every turn he's ta'en towards manhood."

"Coom, lass; that's noan the way to be talking. Be thankful to Marcy that thou'st getten a man for thy son as stands five foot eleven in's stockings, and ne'er a sick piece about him. We wunnot grudge him his fling, will we, Bess, my wench? He'll be coming back in a year, or, may be, a bit more, and be a' for settling in a quiet town like, wi' a wife that's noan so fur fra' me at this very minute. An' we oud folk, as we get into years, must gi' up farm, and tak a bit on a house near Lawyer Benjamin."

And so the good Nathan, his own heart heavy enough, tried to soothe his women-kind. But, of the three, his eyes were longest in closing, his apprehensions the deepest founded.

"I misdoubt me I hanna done well by th' lad. I misdoubt me sore," was the thought that kept him awake till day began to dawn. "Summat's wrong about him, or folk would na look at me wi' such piteous-like een, when they speak on him. I can see th' meaning of it, thof I'm too proud to let on. And Lawson, too, he holds his tongue more nor he should do, when I ax him how my lad's getting on, and whatten sort of a lawyer he'll mak. God be marciful to Hester an' me, if th' lad's gone away! God be marciful! But, may be, it's this lying waking a' the night through, that maks me so fearfu'. Why, when I were his age, I daur be bound I should ha' spent money fast enoof, i' I could ha' come by it. But I had to arn it; that maks a great differ'. Well! It were hard to thwart th' child of our old age, and we waitin' so long for to have 'un!"

Next morning, Nathan rode Moggy, the cart-horse, into Highminster to see Mr. Lawson. Anybody who saw him ride out of his own yard would have been struck with the

change in him which was visible when he returned: a change greater than a day's unusual exercise should have made in a man of his years. He scarcely held the reins at all. One jerk of Moggy's head would have plucked them out of his hands. His head was bent forward, his eyes looking on some unseen thing, with long, unwinking gaze. But, as he drew near home on his return, he made an effort to recover himself.

"No need fretting them," he said; "lads will be lads. But I didna think he had it in him to be so thowtless, young as he is. Well, well! he'll, may be, get more wisdom i' Lunnon. Anyways, it's best to cut him off fra such evil lads as Will Hawker, and such-like. It's they as have led my boy astray. He were a good chap till he knowed them—a good chap till he knowed them."

But he put all his cares in the background, when he came into the house-place, where both Bessy and his wife met him at the door, and both would fain lend a hand to take off his great-coat.

"Theer, wenches, theer! ye might let a man alone for to get out on's clothes! Why, I might ha' struck thee, lass." And he went on talking, trying to keep them off for a time from the subject that all had at heart. But there was no putting them off for ever; and, by dint of repeated questioning on his wife's part, more was got out than he had ever meant to tell—enough to grieve both his hearers sorely: and yet the brave old man still kept the worst in his own breast.

The next day, Benjamin came home for a week or two, before making his great start to London. His father kept him at a distance, and was solemn and quiet in his manner to the young man. Bessy, who had shown anger enough at first, and had uttered many a sharp speech, began to relent, and then to feel hurt and displeased that her uncle should persevere so long in his cold, reserved manner—and Benjamin just going to leave them! Her aunt went, tremblingly busy, about the clothes-presses and drawers, as if afraid of letting herself think either of the past or the future; only once or

twice, coming behind her son, she suddenly stopped over his sitting figure, and kissed his cheek, and stroked his hair. Bessy remembered afterwards—long years afterwards—how he had tossed his head away with nervous irritability on one of these occasions, and had muttered—her aunt did not hear it, but Bessy did—

"Can't you leave a man alone?"

Towards Bessy herself he was pretty gracious. No other words express his manner: it was not warm, nor tender, nor cousinly, but there was an assumption of underbred politeness towards her as a young, pretty woman; which politeness was neglected in his authoritative or grumbling manner towards his mother, or his sullen silence before his father. He once or twice ventured on a compliment to Bessy on her personal appearance. She stood still, and looked at him with astonishment.

"Have my eyes changed sin' last thou saw'st them," she asked, "that thou must be telling me about 'em i' that fashion? I'd raythe by a deal see thee helping thy mother, when she's dropped her knitting-needle and canna see i' th' dusk for to pick it up."

But Bessy thought of his pretty speech about her eyes, long after he had forgotten making it, and when he would have been puzzled to tell the colour of them. Many a day, after he was gone, did she look earnestly in the little oblong looking-glass, which hung up against the wall of her little sleeping-chamber, but which she used to take down in order to examine the eyes he had praised, murmuring to herself, "Pretty, soft grey eyes! Pretty, soft grey eyes!" until she would hang up the glass again, with a sudden laugh and a rosy blush.

In the days when he had gone away to the vague distance and vaguer place—the city called London—Bessy tried to forget all that had gone against her feeling of the affection and duty that a son owed to his parents; and she had many things to forget of this kind that would keep surging up into her mind. For instance, she wished that he had not objected to the home-spun, home-made shirts which his mother and

she had had such pleasure in getting ready for him. He might not know, it was true—and so her love urged—how carefully and evenly the thread had been spun: how, not content with bleaching the yarn in the sunniest meadow, the linen, on its return from the weaver's, had been spread out afresh on the sweet summer grass, and watered carefully, night after night, when there was no dew to perform the kindly office. He did not know—for no one but Bessy herself did—how many false or large stitches, made large and false by her aunt's failing eyes (who yet liked to do the choicest part of the stitching all by herself), Bessy had unpicked at night in her own room, and with dainty fingers had re-stitched; sewing eagerly in the dead of night. All this he did not know; or he could never have complained of the coarse texture, the old-fashioned make of these shirts, and urged on his mother to give him part of her little store of egg- and butter-money, in order to buy newer-fashioned linen in Highminster.

When once that little precious store of his mother's was discovered, it was well for Bessy's peace of mind that she did not know how loosely her aunt counted up the coins, mistaking guineas for shillings, or just the other way, so that the amount was seldom the same in the old black spoutless teapot. Yet this son, this hope, this love, had still a strange power of fascination over the household. The evening before he left, he sat between his parents, a hand in theirs on either side, and Bessy on the old creepie-stool, her head lying on her aunt's knee, and looking up at him from time to time, as if to learn his face off by heart; till his glances, meeting hers, made her drop her eyes, and only sigh.

He stopped up late that night with his father, long after the women had gone to bed. But not to sleep; for I will answer for it the grey-haired mother never slept a wink till the late dawn of the autumn day; and Bessy heard her uncle come upstairs with heavy, deliberate footsteps, and go to the old stocking which served him for bank, and count out the golden guineas; once he stopped, but again he went on

afresh, as if resolved to crown his gift with liberality. Another long pause—in which she could but indistinctly hear continued words, it might have been advice, it might be a prayer, for it was in her uncle's voice—and then father and son came up to bed. Bessy's room was but parted from her cousin's by a thin wooden partition; and the last sound she distinctly heard, before her eyes, tired out with crying, closed themselves in sleep, was the guineas clinking down upon each other at regular intervals, as if Benjamin were playing at pitch and toss with his father's present.

After he was gone, Bessy wished he had asked her to walk part of the way with him into Highminster. She was all ready, her things laid out on the bed; but she could not accompany him without invitation.

The little household tried to close over the gap as best they might. They seemed to set themselves to their daily work with unusual vigour; but somehow, when evening came there had been little done. Heavy hearts never make light work, and there was no telling how much care and anxiety each had had to bear in secret in the field, at the wheel, or in the dairy. Formerly, he was looked for every Saturday—looked for, though he might not come; or, if he came, there were things to be spoken about that made his visit anything but a pleasure: still, he might come, and all things might go right; and then what sunshine, what gladness to those humble people! But now he was away, and dreary winter was come on; old folks' sight fails, and the evenings were long and sad, in spite of all Bessy could do or say. And he did not write so often as he might—so each one thought; though each one would have been ready to defend him from either of the others who had expressed such a thought aloud. "Surely," said Bessy to herself, when the first primroses peeped out in a sheltered and sunny hedge-bank, and she gathered them as she passed home from afternoon church—"surely, there never will be such a dreary, miserable winter again as this has been." There had been a great change in Nathan and Hester Huntroyd during this last year. The

spring before, when Benjamin was yet the subject of more hopes than fears, his father and mother looked what I may call an elderly middle-aged couple: people who had a good deal of hearty work in them yet. Now—it was not his absence alone that caused the change—they looked frail and old, as if each day's natural trouble was a burden more than they could bear. For Nathan had heard sad reports about his only child, and had told them solemnly to his wife—as things too bad to be believed, and yet, "God help us if he is indeed such a lad as this!" Their eyes were become too dry and hollow for many tears; they sat together, hand in hand; and shivered, and sighed, and did not speak many words, or dare to look at each other: and then Hester had said—

"We mauna tell th' lass. Young folks' hearts break wi' a little, and she'd be apt to fancy it were true." Here the old woman's voice broke into a kind of piping cry; but she struggled, and her next words were all right. "We mauna tell her: he's bound to be fond on her, and, may be, if she thinks well on him, and loves him, it will bring him straight!"

"God grant it!" said Nathan.

"God shall grant it!" said Hester, passionately moaning out her words; and then repeating them, alas! with a vain repetition.

"It's a bad place for lying, is Highminster," said she at length, as if impatient of the silence. "I never knowed such a place for getting up stories. But Bessy knows nought on 'em, and nother you nor me belie'es 'em, that's one blessing."

But, if they did not in their hearts believe them, how came they to look so sad and worn, beyond what mere age could make them?

Then came round another year, another winter, yet more miserable than the last. This year, with the primroses, came Benjamin; a bad, hard, flippant young man, with yet enough of specious manners and handsome countenance to make his appearance striking at first to those to whom the aspect of a London fast young man of the lowest order is strange and

new. Just at first, as he sauntered in with a swagger and an air of indifference, which was partly assumed, partly real, his old parents felt a simple kind of awe of him, as if he were not their son, but a real gentleman; but they had too much fine instinct in their homely natures not to know, after a very few minutes had passed, that this was not a true prince.

"Whatten ever does he mean," said Hester to her niece, as soon as they were alone, "by a' them maks and wear-locks? And he minces his words, as if his tongue were clipped short, or split like a magpie's. Hech! London is as bad as a hot day i' August for spoiling good flesh; for he were a good-looking lad when he went up; and now, look at him, with his skin gone into lines and flourishes, just like the first page on a copybook."

"I think he looks a good deal better, aunt, for them new-fashioned whiskers!" said Bessy, blushing still at the remembrance of the kiss he had given her on first seeing her—a pledge, she thought, poor girl, that, in spite of his long silence in letter-writing, he still looked upon her as his troth-plight wife. There were things about him which none of them liked, although they never spoke of them; yet there was also something to gratify them in the way in which he remained quiet at Nab-End, instead of seeking variety, as he had formerly done, by constantly stealing off to the neighbouring town. His father had paid all the debts that he knew of, soon after Benjamin had gone up to London; so there were no duns that his parents knew of to alarm him, and keep him at home. And he went out in the morning with the old man, his father, and lounged by his side, as Nathan went round his fields, with busy yet infirm gait; having heart, as he would have expressed it, in all that was going on, because at length his son seemed to take an interest in the farming affairs, and stood patiently by his side, while he compared his own small galloways with the great shorthorns looming over his neighbour's hedge.

"It's a slovenly way, thou seest, that of selling th' milk; folk don't care whether it's good or not, so that they get

their pint-measure full of stuff that's watered afore it leaves th' beast, instead o' honest cheating by the help o' th' pump. But look at Bessy's butter, what skill it shows! part her own manner o' making, and part good choice o' cattle. It's a pleasure to see her basket, a' packed ready for to go to market; and it's noan o' a pleasure for to see the buckets fu' of their blue starch-water as yon beasts give. I'm thinking they crossed th' breed wi' a pump not long sin'. Hech! but our Bessy's a clever canny wench! I sometimes think thou'lt be for gie'ing up th' law, and taking to th' oud trade, when thou wedst wi' her!" This was intended to be a skilful way of ascertaining whether there was any ground for the old farmer's wish and prayer, that Benjamin might give up the law and return to the primitive occupation of his father. Nathan dared to hope it now, since his son had never made much by his profession, owing, as he had said, to his want of a connection; and the farm, and the stock, and the clean wife, too, were ready to his hand; and Nathan could safely rely on himself never, in his most unguarded moments, to reproach his son with the hardly-earned hundreds that had been spent on his education. So the old man listened with painful interest to the answer which his son was evidently struggling to make, coughing a little and blowing his nose, before he spoke.

"Well, you see, father, law is a precarious livelihood; a man, as I may express myself, has no chance in the profession unless he is known—known to the judges, and tip-top barristers, and that sort of thing. Now, you see, my mother and you have no acquaintance that you may call exactly in that line. But luckily I have met with a man, a friend, as I may say, who is really a first-rate fellow, knowing everybody, from the Lord Chancellor downwards; and he has offered me a share in his business—a partnership, in short"—— He hesitated a little.

"I'm sure that's uncommon kind of the gentleman," said Nathan. "I should like for to thank him mysen; for it's not many as would pick up a young chap out o' th' dirt, as

it were, and say 'Here's hauf my good fortune for you, sir, and your very good health!' Most on 'em, when they're gettin' a bit o' luck, run off wi' it to keep it a' to themselves, and gobble it down in a corner. What may be his name? for I should like to know it."

"You don't quite apprehend me, father. A great deal of what you've said is true to the letter. People don't like to share their good luck, as you say."

"The more credit to them as does," broke in Nathan.

"Ay, but, you see, even such a fine fellow as my friend Cavendish does not like to give away half his good practice for nothing. He expects an equivalent."

"'An equivalent?'" said Nathan; his voice had dropped down an octave. "And what may that be? There's always some meaning in grand words, I take it; though I am not book-larned enough to find it out."

"Why, in this case, the equivalent he demands for taking me into partnership, and afterwards relinquishing the whole business to me, is three hundred pounds down."

Benjamin looked sideways from under his eyes, to see how his father took the proposition. His father struck his stick deep down in the ground; and, leaning one hand upon it, faced round at him.

"Then thy fine friend may go and be hanged. Three hunder pounds! I'll be darned an' danged too, if I know where to get 'em, if I'd be making a fool o' thee an' mysen too."

He was out of breath by this time. His son took his father's first words in dogged silence; it was but the burst of surprise he had led himself to expect, and did not daunt him for long.

"I should think, sir"——

"'Sir'—whatten for dost thou 'sir' me? Is them your manners? I'm plain Nathan Huntroyd, who never took on to be a gentleman; but I have paid my way up to this time, which I shannot do much longer, if I'm to have a son coming an' asking me for three hundred pound, just meet

same as if I were a cow, and had nothing to do but let down my milk to the first person as strokes me."

"Well, father," said Benjamin, with an affectation of frankness; "then there's nothing for me but to do as I have often planned before—go and emigrate."

"And *what?*" said his father, looking sharply and steadily at him.

"Emigrate. Go to America, or India, or some colony where there would be an opening for a young man of spirit."

Benjamin had reserved this proposition for his trump card, expecting by means of it to carry all before him. But, to his surprise, his father plucked his stick out of the hole he had made when he so vehemently thrust it into the ground, and walked on four or five steps in advance; there he stood still again, and there was a dead silence for a few minutes.

"It 'ud, may be, be the best thing thou couldst do," the father began. Benjamin set his teeth hard to keep in curses. It was well for poor Nathan he did not look round then, and see the look his son gave him. "But it would come hard like upon us, upon Hester and me; for, whether thou'rt a good 'un or not, thou'rt our flesh and blood, our only bairn; and, if thou'rt not all as a man could wish, it's, may be, been the fault on our pride i' the—— It 'ud kill the missus, if he went off to Amerikay, and Bess, too, the lass as thinks so much on him!" The speech, originally addressed to his son, had wandered off into a monologue—as keenly listened to by Benjamin, however, as if it had all been spoken to him. After a pause of consideration, his father turned round: "Yon man—I wunnot call him a friend o' yourn, to think of asking you for such a mint o' money—is not th' only one, I'll be bound, as could give ye a start i' the law? Other folks 'ud, may be, do it for less?"

"Not one of 'em; to give me equal advantages," said Benjamin, thinking he perceived signs of relenting.

"Well, then, thou may'st tell him that it's nother he nor

thee as 'll see th' sight o' three hundred pound o' my money. I'll not deny as I've a bit laid up again' a rainy day; it's not so much as thatten, though; and a part on it is for Bessy, as has been like a daughter to us."

"But Bessy is to be your real daughter some day, when I've a home to take her to," said Benjamin; for he played very fast and loose, even in his own mind, with his engagement with Bessy. Present with her, when she was looking her brightest and best, he behaved to her as if they were engaged lovers; absent from her, he looked upon her rather as a good wedge, to be driven into his parents' favour on his behalf. Now, however, he was not exactly untrue in speaking as if he meant to make her his wife; for the thought was in his mind, though he made use of it to work upon his father.

"It will be a dree day for us, then," said the old man. "But God 'll have us in His keeping, and 'll, may-happen, be taking more care on us i' heaven by that time than Bess, good lass as she is, has had on us at Nab-End. Her heart is set on thee, too. But, lad, I hanna gotten the three hunder; I keeps my cash i' th' stocking, thou know'st, till it reaches fifty pound, and then I takes it to Ripon Bank. Now the last scratch they'n gi'en me made it just two-hunder, and I hanna but on to fifteen pound yet i' the stockin', and I meant one hunder an' the red cow's calf to be for Bess, she's ta'en such pleasure like i' rearing it."

Benjamin gave a sharp glance at his father, to see if he was telling the truth; and, that a suspicion of the old man, his father, had entered into the son's head, tells enough of his own character.

"I canna do it, I canna do it, for sure; although I shall like to think as I had helped on the wedding. There's the black heifer to be sold yet, and she'll fetch a matter of ten pound; but a deal on't will be needed for seed-corn, for the arable did but bad last year, and I thought I would try—I'll tell thee what, lad! I'll make it as though Bess lent thee her hunder, only thou must give her a writ of hand for it;

and thou shalt have a' the money i' Ripon Bank, and see if the lawyer wunnot let thee have a share of what he offered thee at three hunder for two. I dunnot mean for to wrong him; but thou must get a fair share for the money. At times, I think thou'rt done by folk; now I wadna have you cheat a bairn of a brass farthing; same time, I wadna have thee so soft as to be cheated."

To explain this, it should be told that some of the bills, which Benjamin had received money from his father to pay, had been altered so as to cover other and less creditable expenses which the young man had incurred; and the simple old farmer, who had still much faith left in him for his boy, was acute enough to perceive that he had paid above the usual price for the articles he had purchased.

After some hesitation, Benjamin agreed to receive the two hundred, and promised to employ it to the best advantage in setting himself up in business. He had, nevertheless, a strange hankering after the additional fifteen pounds that was left to accumulate in the stocking. It was his, he thought, as heir to his father; and he soon lost some of his usual complaisance for Bessy that evening, as he dwelt on the idea that there was money being laid by for her, and grudged it to her even in imagination. He thought more of this fifteen pounds that he was not to have than of all the hardly-earned and humbly-saved two hundred that he was to come into possession of. Meanwhile, Nathan was in unusual spirits that evening. He was so generous and affectionate at heart, that he had an unconscious satisfaction in having helped two people on the road to happiness by the sacrifice of the greater part of his property. The very fact of having trusted his son so largely seemed to make Benjamin more worthy of trust in his father's estimation. The sole idea he tried to banish was, that, if all came to pass as he hoped, both Benjamin and Bessy would be settled far away from Nab-End; but then he had a child-like reliance that "God would take care of him and his missus, somehow or anodder. It wur o' no use looking too far ahead."

Bessy had to hear many unintelligible jokes from her uncle that night, for he made no doubt that Benjamin had told her all that had passed; whereas the truth was, his son had said never a word to his cousin on the subject.

When the old couple were in bed, Nathan told his wife of the promise he had made to his son, and the plan in life which the advance of the two hundred was to promote. Poor Hester was a little startled at the sudden change in the destination of the sum, which she had long thought of with secret pride as "money i' th' bank." But she was willing enough to part with it, if necessary, for Benjamin. Only, how such a sum could be necessary, was the puzzle. But even this perplexity was jostled out of her mind by the overwhelming idea, not only of "our Ben" settling in London, but of Bessy going there too as his wife. This great trouble swallowed up all care about money, and Hester shivered and sighed all the night through with distress. In the morning, as Bessy was kneading the bread, her aunt, who had been sitting by the fire in an unusual manner, for one of her active habits, said—

"I reckon we maun go to th' shop for our bread; an' that's a thing I never thought to come to so long as I lived."

Bessy looked up from her kneading, surprised.

"I'm sure, I'm noan going to eat their nasty stuff. What for do ye want to get baker's bread, aunt? This dough will rise as high as a kite in a south wind."

"I'm not up to kneading as I could do once; it welly breaks my back; and, when thou'rt off in London, I reckon we maun buy our bread, first time in my life."

"I'm not a-goin to London," said Bessy, kneading away with fresh resolution, and growing very red, either with the idea or the exertion.

"But our Ben is going partner wi' a great London lawyer; and thou know'st he'll not tarry long but what he'll fetch thee."

"Now, aunt," said Bessy, stripping her arms of the dough, but still not looking up, "if that's all, don't fret yourself.

Ben will have twenty minds in his head, afore he settles, eyther in business or in wedlock. I sometimes wonder," she said, with increasing vehemence, "why I go on thinking on him; for I dunnot think he thinks on me, when I'm out o' sight. I've a month's mind to try and forget him this time, when he leaves us—that I have!"

"For shame, wench! and he to be planning and purposing, all for thy sake! It wur only yesterday as he wur talking to thy uncle, and mapping it out so clever; only, thou seest, wench, it'll be dree work for us when both thee and him is gone."

The old woman began to cry the kind of tearless cry of the aged. Bessy hastened to comfort her; and the two talked, and grieved, and hoped, and planned for the days that now were to be, till they ended, the one in being consoled, the other in being secretly happy.

Nathan and his son came back from Highminster that evening, with their business transacted in the round-about way which was most satisfactory to the old man. If he had thought it necessary to take half as much pains in ascertaining the truth of the plausible details by which his son bore out the story of the offered partnership, as he did in trying to get his money conveyed to London in the most secure manner, it would have been well for him. But he knew nothing of all this, and acted in the way which satisfied his anxiety best. He came home tired, but content; not in such high spirits as on the night before, but as easy in his mind as he could be on the eve of his son's departure. Bessy, pleasantly agitated by her aunt's tale of the morning of her cousin's true love for her ("what ardently we wish we long believe") and the plan which was to end in their marriage—end to her, the woman, at least—looked almost pretty in her bright, blushing comeliness, and more than once, as she moved about from kitchen to dairy, Benjamin pulled her towards him, and gave her a kiss. To all such proceedings the old couple were wilfully blind; and, as night drew on, every one became sadder and quieter, thinking of

the parting that was to be on the morrow. As the hours slipped away, Bessy too became subdued; and, by-and-by, her simple cunning was exerted to get Benjamin to sit down next his mother, whose very heart was yearning after him, as Bessy saw. When once her child was placed by her side, and she had got possession of his hand, the old woman kept stroking it, and murmuring long unused words of endearment, such as she had spoken to him while he was yet a little child. But all this was wearisome to him. As long as he might play with, and plague, and caress Bessy, he had not been sleepy; but now he yawned loudly. Bessy could have boxed his ears for not curbing this gaping; at any rate, he need not have done it so openly—so almost ostentatiously. His mother was more pitiful.

"Thou'rt tired, my lad!" said she, putting her hand fondly on his shoulder; but it fell off, as he stood up suddenly, and said—

"Yes, deuced tired! I'm off to bed." And with a rough, careless kiss all round, even to Bessy, as if he was "deuced tired" of playing the lover, he was gone; leaving the three to gather up their thoughts slowly, and follow him upstairs.

He seemed almost impatient at them for rising betimes to see him off the next morning, and made no more of a good-bye than some such speech as this: "Well, good folk, when next I see you, I hope you'll have merrier faces than you have to-day. Why, you might be going to a funeral; it's enough to scare a man from the place; you look quite ugly to what you did last night, Bess."

He was gone; and they turned into the house, and settled to the long day's work without many words about their loss. They had no time for unnecessary talking, indeed; for much had been left undone, during his short visit, that ought to have been done, and they had now to work double tides. Hard work was their comfort for many a long day.

For some time Benjamin's letters, if not frequent, were

full of exultant accounts of his well-doing. It is true that the details of his prosperity were somewhat vague; but the fact was broadly and unmistakably stated. Then came longer pauses; shorter letters, altered in tone. About a year after he had left them, Nathan received a letter which bewildered and irritated him exceedingly. Something had gone wrong—what, Benjamin did not say—but the letter ended with a request that was almost a demand, for the remainder of his father's savings, whether in the stocking or the bank. Now, the year had not been prosperous with Nathan; there had been an epidemic among cattle, and he had suffered along with his neighbours; and, moreover, the price of cows, when he had bought some to repair his wasted stock, was higher than he had ever remembered it before. The fifteen pounds in the stocking, which Benjamin left, had diminished to little more than three; and to have that required of him in so peremptory a manner! Before Nathan imparted the contents of this letter to any one (Bessy and her aunt had gone to market in a neighbour's cart that day), he got pen and ink and paper, and wrote back an ill-spelt, but very explicit and stern negative. Benjamin had had his portion; and if he could not make it do, so much the worse for him; his father had no more to give him. That was the substance of the letter.

The letter was written, directed, and sealed, and given to the country postman, returning to Highminster after his day's distribution and collection of letters, before Hester and Bessy came back from market. It had been a pleasant day of neighbourly meeting and sociable gossip; prices had been high, and they were in good spirits—only agreeably tired, and full of small pieces of news. It was some time before they found out how flatly all their talk fell on the ears of the stay-at-home listener. But, when they saw that his depression was caused by something beyond their powers of accounting for by any little every-day cause, they urged him to tell them what was the matter. His anger had not gone off. It had rather increased by dwelling upon it, and he spoke it out in

good, resolute terms; and, long ere he had ended, the two women were as sad, if not as angry, as himself. Indeed, it was many days before either feeling wore away in the minds of those who entertained them. Bessy was the soonest comforted, because she found a vent for her sorrow in action: action that was half as a kind of compensation for many a sharp word that she had spoken, when her cousin had done anything to displease her on his last visit, and half because she believed that he never could have written such a letter to his father, unless his want of money had been very pressing and real; though how he could ever have wanted money so soon, after such a heap of it had been given to him, was more than she could justly say. Bessy got out all her savings of little presents of sixpences and shillings, ever since she had been a child—of all the money she had gained for the eggs of two hens, called her own; she put the whole together, and it was above two pounds—two pounds five and sevenpence, to speak accurately—and, leaving out the penny as a nest-egg for her future savings, she made up the rest in a little parcel, and sent it, with a note, to Benjamin's address in London:—

"From a well-wisher.

"Dr Benjamin,—Unkle has lost 2 cows and a vast of monney. He is a good deal Angored, but more Troubled. So no more at present. Hopeing this will finding you well As it leaves us. Tho' lost to Site, To Memory Dear. Repayment not kneeded.—Your effectonet cousin,

"Elizabeth Rose."

When this packet was once fairly sent off, Bessy began to sing again over her work. She never expected the mere form of acknowledgment; indeed, she had such faith in the carrier (who took parcels to York, whence they were forwarded to London by coach), that she felt sure he would go on purpose to London to deliver anything intrusted to him, if he had not full confidence in the person, persons, coach

and horses, to whom he committed it. Therefore she was not anxious that she did not hear of its arrival. "Giving a thing to a man as one knows," said she to herself, "is a vast different to poking a thing through a hole into a box, th' inside of which one has never clapped eyes on; and yet letters get safe, some ways or another." (The belief in the infallibility of the post was destined to a shock before long.) But she had a secret yearning for Benjamin's thanks, and some of the old words of love that she had been without so long. Nay, she even thought—when, day after day, week after week, passed by without a line—that he might be winding up his affairs in that weary, wasteful London, and coming back to Nab-End to thank her in person.

One day—her aunt was upstairs, inspecting the summer's make of cheeses, her uncle out in the fields—the postman brought a letter into the kitchen to Bessy. A country postman, even now, is not much pressed for time; and in those days there were but few letters to distribute, and they were only sent out from Highminster once a week into the district in which Nab-End was situated; and, on those occasions, the letter-carrier usually paid morning calls on the various people for whom he had letters. So, half-standing by the dresser, half-sitting on it, he began to rummage out his bag. "It's a queer-like thing I've got for Nathan this time. I am afraid it will bear ill news in it; for there's 'Dead Letter Office' stamped on the top of it."

"Lord save us!" said Bessy, and sat down on the nearest chair, as white as a sheet. In an instant, however, she was up; and, snatching the ominous letter out of the man's hands, she pushed him before her out of the house, and said, "Be off wi' thee, afore aunt comes down"; and ran past him as hard as she could, till she reached the field where she expected to find her uncle.

"Uncle," said she, breathless, "what is it? Oh, uncle, speak! Is he dead?"

Nathan's hands trembled, and his eyes dazzled. "Take it," he said, "and tell me what it is."

"It's a letter—it's from you to Benjamin, it is—and there's words written on it, 'Not known at the address given;' so they've sent it back to the writer—that's you, uncle. Oh, it gave me such a start, with them nasty words written outside!"

Nathan had taken the letter back into his own hands, and was turning it over, while he strove to understand what the quick-witted Bessy had picked up at a glance. But he arrived at a different conclusion.

"He's dead!" said he. "The lad is dead, and he never knowed how as I were sorry I wrote to 'un so sharp. My lad! my lad!" Nathan sat down on the ground where he stood, and covered his face with his old, withered hands. The letter returned to him was one which he had written, with infinite pains and at various times, to tell his child, in kinder words and at greater length than he had done before, the reasons why he could not send him the money demanded. And now Benjamin was dead; nay, the old man immediately jumped to the conclusion that his child had been starved to death, without money, in a wild, wide, strange place. All he could say at first was—

"My heart, Bess—my heart is broken!" And he put his hand to his side, still keeping his shut eyes covered with the other, as though he never wished to see the light of day again. Bessy was down by his side in an instant, holding him in her arms, chafing and kissing him.

"It's noan so bad, uncle; he's not dead; the letter does not say that, dunnot think it. He's flitted from that lodging, and the lazy tykes dunna know where to find him; and so they just send y' back th' letter, instead of trying fra' house to house, as Mark Benson would. I've always heerd tell on south-country folk for laziness. He's noan dead, uncle; he's just flitted; and he'll let us know afore long where he's getten to. May be, it's a cheaper place; for that lawyer has cheated him, ye reck'lect, and he'll be trying to live for as little as he can, that's all, uncle. Dunnot take on so; for it doesna say he's dead."

By this time Bessy was crying with agitation, although she firmly believed in her own view of the case, and had felt the opening of the ill-favoured letter as a great relief. Presently she began to urge, both with word and action, upon her uncle, that he should sit no longer on the damp grass. She pulled him up; for he was very stiff, and, as he said, "all shaken to dithers." She made him walk about, repeating over and over again her solution of the case, always in the same words, beginning again and again, "He's noan dead; it's just been a flitting," and so on. Nathan shook his head, and tried to be convinced; but it was a steady belief in his own heart for all that. He looked so deathly ill on his return home with Bessy (for she would not let him go on with his day's work), that his wife made sure he had taken cold; and he, weary and indifferent to life, was glad to subside into bed and the rest from exertion which his real bodily illness gave him. Neither Bessy nor he spoke of the letter again, even to each other, for many days; and she found means to stop Mark Benson's tongue and satisfy his kindly curiosity, by giving him the rosy side of her own view of the case.

Nathan got up again, an older man in looks and constitution by ten years for that week of bed. His wife gave him many a scolding on his imprudence for sitting down in the wet field, if ever so tired. But now she, too, was beginning to be uneasy at Benjamin's long-continued silence. She could not write herself; but she urged her husband many a time to send a letter to ask for news of her lad. He said nothing in reply for some time; at length, he told her he would write next Sunday afternoon. Sunday was his general day for writing, and this Sunday he meant to go to church for the first time since his illness. On Saturday he was very persistent, against his wife's wishes (backed by Bessy as hard as she could), in resolving to go into Highminster to market. The change would do him good, he said. But he came home tired, and a little mysterious in his ways. When he went to the shippon the last thing at night, he

asked Bessy to go with him, and hold the lantern, while he looked at an ailing cow; and, when they were fairly out of the ear-shot of the house, he pulled a little shop-parcel from his pocket and said—

"Thou'lt put that on ma Sunday hat, wilt'ou, lass? It'll be a bit on a comfort to me; for I know my lad's dead and gone, though I dunna speak on it, for fear o' grieving th' old woman and ye."

"I'll put it on, uncle, if—— But he's noan dead." (Bessy was sobbing.)

"I know—I know, lass. I dunnot wish other folk to hold my opinion; but I'd like to wear a bit o' crape out o' respect to my boy. It 'ud have done me good for to have ordered a black coat; but she'd see if I had na' on my wedding-coat, Sundays, for a' she's losing her eyesight, poor old wench! But she'll ne'er take notice o' a bit o' crape. Thou'lt put it on all canny and tidy."

So Nathan went to church with a strip of crape, as narrow as Bessy durst venture to make it, round his hat. Such is the contradictoriness of human nature that, though he was most anxious his wife should not hear of his conviction that their son was dead, he was half-hurt that none of his neighbours noticed his sign of mourning so far as to ask him for whom he wore it.

But after a while, when they never heard a word from or about Benjamin, the household wonder as to what had become of him grew so painful and strong, that Nathan no longer kept his idea to himself. Poor Hester, however, rejected it with her whole will, heart, and soul. She could not and would not believe—nothing should make her believe—that her only child Benjamin had died without some sign of love or farewell to her. No arguments could shake her in this. She believed that, if all natural means of communication between her and him had been cut off at the last supreme moment—if death had come upon him in an instant, sudden and unexpected—her intense love would have been supernaturally made conscious of the blank.

Nathan at times tried to feel glad that she could still hope to see the lad again; but at other moments he wanted her sympathy in his grief, his self-reproach, his weary wonder as to how and what they had done wrong in the treatment of their son, that he had been such a care and sorrow to his parents. Bessy was convinced, first by her aunt, and then by her uncle—honestly convinced—on both sides of the argument, and so, for the time, able to sympathise with each. But she lost her youth in a very few months; she looked set and middle-aged, long before she ought to have done, and rarely smiled and never sang again.

All sorts of new arrangements were required by the blow which told so miserably upon the energies of all the household at Nab-end. Nathan could no longer go about and direct his two men, taking a good turn of work himself at busy times. Hester lost her interest in the dairy; for which, indeed, her increasing loss of sight unfitted her. Bessy would either do field-work, or attend to the cows and the shippon, or churn, or make cheese; she did all well, no longer merrily, but with something of stern cleverness. But she was not sorry when her uncle, one evening, told her aunt and her that a neighbouring farmer, Job Kirkby, had made him an offer to take so much of his land off his hands as would leave him only pasture enough for two cows, and no arable to attend to; while Farmer Kirkby did not wish to interfere with anything in the house, only would be glad to use some of the out-building for his fattening cattle.

"We can do wi' Hawky and Daisy; it'll leave us eight or ten pound o' butter to take to market i' summer time, and keep us fra' thinking too much, which is what I'm dreading on as I get into years."

"Ay," said his wife. "Thou'll not have to go so far a-field, if it's only the Aster-Toft as is on thy hands. And Bess will have to gie up her pride i' cheese, and tak' to making cream-butter. I'd allays a fancy for trying at cream-butter; but th' whey had to be used; else, where I come fra', they'd never ha' looked near whey-butter."

When Hester was left alone with Bessy, she said, in allusion to this change of plan—

"I'm thankful to the Lord that it is as it is; for I were allays afeared Nathan would have to gie up the house and farm altogether, and then the lad would na know where to find us when he came back fra' Merikay. He's gone there for to make his fortune, I'll be bound. Keep up thy heart, lass, he'll be home some day; and have sown his wild oats. Eh! but thatten's a pretty story i' the Gospel about the Prodigal, who'd to eat the pigs' vittle at one time, but ended i' clover in his father's house. And I'm sure our Nathan 'll be ready to forgive him, and love him, and make much of him—may be, a deal more nor me, who never gave in to 's death. It'll be liken to a resurrection to our Nathan."

Farmer Kirkby, then, took by far the greater part of the land belonging to Nab-End Farm; and the work about the rest, and about the two remaining cows, was easily done by three pairs of willing hands, with a little occasional assistance. The Kirkby family were pleasant enough to have to deal with. There was a son, a stiff, grave bachelor, who was very particular and methodical about his work, and rarely spoke to any one. But Nathan took it into his head that John Kirkby was looking after Bessy, and was a good deal troubled in his mind in consequence; for it was the first time he had to face the effects of his belief in his son's death; and he discovered, to his own surprise, that he had not that implicit faith which would make it easy for him to look upon Bessy as the wife of another man than the one to whom she had been betrothed in her youth. As, however, John Kirkby seemed in no hurry to make his intentions (if indeed he had any) clear to Bessy, it was only now and then that his jealousy on behalf of his lost son seized upon Nathan.

But people, old, and in deep hopeless sorrow, grow irritable at times, however they may repent and struggle against their irritability. There were days when Bessy had to bear a good deal from her uncle; but she loved him so

dearly and respected him so much, that, high as her temper was to all other people, she never returned him a rough or impatient word. And she had a reward in the conviction of his deep, true affection for her, and her aunt's entire and most sweet dependence upon her.

One day, however—it was near the end of November—Bessy had had a good deal to bear, that seemed more than usually unreasonable, on the part of her uncle. The truth was, that one of Kirkby's cows was ill, and John Kirkby was a good deal about in the farmyard; Bessy was interested about the animal, and had helped in preparing a mash over their own fire, that had to be given warm to the sick creature. If John had been out of the way, there would have been no one more anxious about the affair than Nathan: both because he was naturally kind-hearted and neighbourly, and also because he was rather proud of his reputation for knowledge in the diseases of cattle. But because John was about, and Bessy helping a little in what had to be done, Nathan would do nothing, and chose to assume that "nothing to think on ailed th' beast; but lads and lasses were allays fain to be feared on something." Now John was upwards of forty, and Bessy nearly eight-and-twenty; so the terms lads and lasses did not exactly apply to their case.

When Bessy brought the milk in from their own cows, towards half-past five o'clock, Nathan bade her make the doors, and not be running out i' the dark and cold about other folks' business; and, though Bessy was a little surprised and a good deal annoyed at his tone, she sat down to her supper without making a remonstrance. It had long been Nathan's custom to look out the last thing at night, to see "what mak' o' weather it wur"; and when, towards half-past eight, he got his stick and went out—two or three steps from the door, which opened into the house-place where they were sitting—Hester put her hand on her niece's shoulder and said—

"He's gotten a touch o' rheumatics, as twinges him and

makes him speak so sharp. I didna like to ask thee afore him, but how's yon poor beast?"

"Very ailing, belike. John Kirkby wur off for th' cow-doctor when I cam in. I reckon they'll have to stop up wi't a' night."

Since their sorrows, her uncle had taken to reading a chapter in the Bible aloud, the last thing at night. He could not read fluently, and often hesitated long over a word, which he miscalled at length; but the very fact of opening the book seemed to soothe those old bereaved parents; for it made them feel quiet and safe in the presence of God, and took them out of the cares and troubles of this world into that futurity which, however dim and vague, was to their faithful hearts as a sure and certain rest. This little quiet time—Nathan sitting with his horn spectacles, the tallow candle between him and the Bible throwing a strong light on his reverent, earnest face; Hester sitting on the other side of the fire, her head bowed in attentive listening; now and then shaking it, and moaning a little, but when a promise came, or any good tidings of great joy, saying "Amen" with fervour; Bessy by her aunt, perhaps her mind a little wandering to some household cares, or it might be on thoughts of those who were absent—this little quiet pause, I say, was grateful and soothing to this household, as a lullaby to a tired child. But this night, Bessy, sitting opposite to the long, low window, only shaded by a few geraniums that grew in the sill, and to the door alongside that window through which her uncle had passed not a quarter of an hour before, saw the wooden latch of the door gently and almost noiselessly lifted up, as if some one were trying it from the outside.

She was startled, and watched again, intently; but it was perfectly still now. She thought it must have been that it had not fallen into its proper place, when her uncle had come in and locked the door. It was just enough to make her uncomfortable, no more; and she almost persuaded herself it must have been fancy. Before going upstairs,

however, she went to the window, to look out into the darkness; but all was still. Nothing to be seen; nothing to be heard. So the three went quietly upstairs to bed.

The house was little better than a cottage. The front door opened on a house-place, over which was the old couple's bed-room. To the left, as you entered this pleasant house-place, and at close right angles with the entrance, was a door that led into the small parlour, which was Hester's and Bessy's pride, although not half as comfortable as the house-place, and never on any occasion used as a sitting-room. There were shells and bunches of honesty in the fireplace; the best chest of drawers, and a company set of gaudy-coloured china, and a bright common carpet on the floor; but all failed to give it the aspect of the homely comfort and delicate cleanliness of the house-place. Over this parlour was the bedroom which Benjamin had slept in when a boy, when at home. It was kept, still, in a kind of readiness for him. The bed was yet there, in which none had slept since he had last done, eight or nine years ago; and every now and then a warming-pan was taken quietly and silently up by his old mother, and the bed thoroughly aired. But this she did in her husband's absence, and without saying a word to any one; nor did Bessy offer to help her, though her eyes often filled with tears, as she saw her aunt still going through the hopeless service. But the room had become a receptacle for all unused things; and there was always a corner of it appropriated to the winter's store of apples. To the left of the house-place, as you stood facing the fire, on the side opposite to the window and outer door, were two other doors; the one on the right led into a kind of back kitchen, and had a lean-to roof, and a door opening on to the farm-yard and back-premises; the left-hand door gave on the stairs, underneath which was a closet, in which various household treasures were kept; and beyond that was the dairy, over which Bessy slept, her little chamber window opening just above the sloping roof of the back-kitchen. There were neither blinds nor shutters to any of the windows, either

upstairs or down; the house was built of stone; and there was heavy framework of the same material round the little casement windows, and the long, low window of the house-place was divided by what, in grander dwellings, would be called mullions.

By nine o'clock this night of which I am speaking, all had gone upstairs to bed; it was even later than usual, for the burning of candles was regarded so much in the light of an extravagance, that the household kept early hours even for country-folk. But, somehow, this evening, Bessy could not sleep; although in general she was in deep slumber five minutes after her head touched the pillow. Her thoughts ran on the chances for John Kirkby's cow, and a little fear lest the disorder might be epidemic and spread to their own cattle. Across all these homely cares came a vivid, uncomfortable recollection of the way in which the door-latch went up and down, without any sufficient agency to account for it. She felt more sure now than she had done downstairs, that it was a real movement, and no effect of her imagination. She wished that it had not happened just when her uncle was reading, that she might at once have gone quick to the door, and convinced herself of the cause. As it was, her thoughts ran uneasily on the supernatural; and thence to Benjamin, her dear cousin and playfellow, her early lover. She had long given him up as lost for ever to her, if not actually dead; but this very giving him up for ever involved a free, full forgiveness of all his wrongs to her. She thought tenderly of him, as of one who might have been led astray in his later years, but who existed rather in her recollection as the innocent child, the spirited lad, the handsome, dashing young man. If John Kirkby's quiet attentions had ever betrayed his wishes to Bessy—if indeed he ever had any wishes on the subject—her first feeling would have been to compare his weather-beaten, middle-aged face and figure with the face and figure she remembered well, but never more expected to see in this life.. So thinking, she became very restless, and weary of bed, and, after long tossing and

turning, ending in a belief that she should never get to sleep at all that night, she went off soundly and suddenly.

As suddenly was she wide awake, sitting up in bed, listening to some noise that must have awakened her, but which was not repeated for some time. Surely it was in her uncle's room—her uncle was up; but, for a minute or two, there was no further sound. Then she heard him open his door, and go downstairs, with hurried, stumbling steps. She now thought that her aunt must be ill, and hastily sprang out of bed, and was putting on her petticoat with hurried, trembling hands, and had just opened her chamber door, when she heard the front door undone, and a scuffle, as of the feet of several people, and many rude, passionate words, spoken hoarsely below the breath. Quick as thought she understood it all—the house was lonely—her uncle had the reputation of being well-to-do—they had pretended to be belated, and had asked their way or something. What a blessing that John Kirkby's cow was sick, for there were several men watching with him! She went back, opened her window, squeezed herself out, slid down the lean-to roof, and ran barefoot and breathless to the shippon—

"John, John, for the love of God, come quick; there's robbers in the house, and uncle and aunt 'll be murdered!" she whispered, in terrified accents, through the closed and barred shippon door. In a moment it was undone, and John and the cow-doctor stood there, ready to act, if they but understood her rightly. Again she repeated her words, with broken, half-unintelligible explanations of what she as yet did not rightly understand.

"Front door is open, say'st thou?" said John, arming himself with a pitchfork, while the cow-doctor took some other implement. "Then I reckon we'd best make for that way o' getting into th' house, and catch 'em all in a trap."

"Run! run!" was all Bessy could say, taking hold of John Kirkby's arm, and pulling him along with her. Swiftly did the three run to the house round the corner, and in at the open front-door. The men carried the horn lantern

they had been using in the shippon; and, by the sudden oblong light that it threw, Bessy saw the principal object of her anxiety, her uncle, lying stunned and helpless on the kitchen-floor. Her first thought was for him; for she had no idea that her aunt was in any immediate danger, although she heard the noise of feet, and fierce, subdued voices upstairs.

"Make th' door behind us, lass. We'll not let 'em escape!" said brave John Kirkby, dauntless in a good cause, though he knew not how many there might be above. The cow-doctor fastened and locked the door, saying, "There!" in a defiant tone, as he put the key in his pocket. It was to be a struggle for life or death, or, at any rate, for effectual capture or desperate escape. Bessy kneeled down by her uncle, who did not speak nor give any sign of consciousness. Bessy raised his head by drawing a pillow off the settle, and putting it under him; she longed to go for water into the back kitchen, but the sound of a violent struggle, and of heavy blows, and of low, hard curses spoken through closed teeth, and muttered passion, as though breath were too much needed for action to be wasted in speech, kept her still and quiet by her uncle's side in the kitchen, where the darkness might almost be felt, so thick and deep was it. Once—in a pause of her own heart's beating—a sudden terror came over her; she perceived, in that strange way in which the presence of a living creature forces itself on our consciousness in the darkest room, that some one was near her, keeping as still as she. It was not the poor old man's breathing that she heard, nor the radiation of his presence that she felt; some one else was in the kitchen; another robber, perhaps, left to guard the old man, with murderous intent if his consciousness returned. Now Bessy was fully aware that self-preservation would keep her terrible companion quiet, as there was no motive for his betraying himself stronger than the desire of escape; any effort for which he, the unseen witness, must know would be rendered abortive by the fact of the door being locked.

Yet, with the knowledge that he was there, close to her still, silent as the grave—with fearful, it might be deadly, unspoken thoughts in his heart—possibly even with keener and stronger sight than hers, as longer accustomed to the darkness, able to discern her figure and posture, and glaring at her like some wild beast—Bessy could not fail to shrink from the vision that her fancy presented! And still the struggle went on upstairs; feet slipping, blows sounding, and the wrench of intentioned aims, the strong gasps for breath, as the wrestlers paused for an instant. In one of these pauses, Bessy felt conscious of a creeping movement close to her, which ceased when the noise of the strife above died away, and was resumed when it again began. She was aware of it by some subtle vibration of the air, rather than by touch or sound. She was sure that he who had been close to her one minute as she knelt, was, the next, passing stealthily towards the inner door which led to the staircase. She thought he was going to join and strengthen his accomplices, and, with a great cry, she sprang after him; but just as she came to the doorway, through which some dim portion of light from the upper chambers came, she saw one man thrown downstairs, with such violence that he fell almost at her very feet, while the dark, creeping figure glided suddenly away to the left, and as suddenly entered the closet beneath the stairs. Bessy had no time to wonder as to his purpose in so doing, whether he had at first designed to aid his accomplices in their desperate fight or not. He was an enemy, a robber, that was all she knew, and she sprang to the door of the closet, and in a trice had locked it on the outside. And then she stood frightened, panting in that dark corner, sick with terror lest the man who lay before her was either John Kirkby or the cow-doctor. If it were either of those friendly two, what would become of the other—of her uncle, her aunt, herself? But, in a very few minutes, this wonder was ended; her two defenders came slowly and heavily down the stairs, dragging with them a man, fierce, sullen, despairing—disabled with terrible blows, which had

made his face one bloody, swollen mass. As for that, neither John nor the cow-doctor was much more presentable. One of them bore the lantern in his teeth; for all their strength was taken up by the weight of the fellow they were bearing.

"Take care," said Bessy, from her corner; "there's a chap just beneath your feet. I dunno know if he's dead or alive; and uncle lies on the floor just beyond."

They stood still on the stairs for a moment. Just then the robber they had thrown downstairs stirred and moaned.

"Bessy," said John, "run off to th' stable and fetch ropes and gearing for to bind 'em; and we'll rid the house on 'em, and thou can'st go see after th' oud folks, who need it sadly."

Bessy was back in a very few minutes. When she came in, there was more light in the house-place, for some one had stirred up the raked fire.

"That felly makes as though his leg were broken," said John, nodding towards the man still lying on the ground. Bessy felt almost sorry for him as they handled him—not over-gently—and bound him, only half-conscious, as hardly and tightly as they had done his fierce, surly companion. She even felt so sorry for his evident agony, as they turned him over and over, that she ran to get him a cup of water to moisten his lips.

"I'm loth to leave yo' with him alone," said John, "though I'm thinking his leg is broken for sartin, and he can't stir, even if he comes to hissel, to do yo' any harm. But we'll just take off this chap, and mak sure of him, and then one on us 'll come back to yo', and we can, may be, find a gate or so for yo' to get shut on him out o' th' house. This felly's made safe enough, I'll be bound," said he, looking at the burglar, who stood, bloody and black, with fell hatred on his sullen face. His eye caught Bessy's, as hers fell on him with dread so evident that it made him smile; and the look and the smile prevented the words from being spoken which were on Bessy's lips.

She dared not tell, before him, that an able-bodied

accomplice still remained in the house; lest, somehow, the door which kept him a prisoner should be broken open and the fight renewed. So she only said to John, as he was leaving the house—

"Thou'll not be long away, for I'm afeared of being left wi' this man."

"He'll noan do thee harm," said John.

"No! but I'm feared lest he should die. And there's uncle and aunt. Come back soon, John!"

"Ay, ay!" said he, half-pleased; "I'll be back, never fear me."

So Bessy shut the door after them, but did not lock it, for fear of mischances in the house, and went once more to her uncle, whose breathing, by this time, was easier than when she had first returned into the house-place with John and the doctor. By the light of the fire, too, she could now see that he had received a blow on the head, which was probably the occasion of his stupor. Round this wound, which was bleeding pretty freely, Bessy put cloths dipped in cold water; and then, leaving him for a time, she lighted a candle, and was about to go upstairs to her aunt, when, just as she was passing the bound and disabled robber, she heard her name softly, urgently called—

"Bessy, Bessy!" At first the voice sounded so close that she thought it must be the unconscious wretch at her feet. But, once again, that voice thrilled through her—

"Bessy, Bessy! for God's sake, let me out!"

She went to the stair-closet door, and tried to speak, but could not, her heart beat so terribly. Again, close to her ear—

"Bessy, Bessy! they'll be back directly; let me out, I say! For God's sake, let me out!" And he began to kick violently against the panels.

"Hush! hush!" she said, sick with a terrible dread, yet with a will strongly resisting her conviction. "Who are you?" But she knew—knew quite well.

"Benjamin." An oath. "Let me out, I say, and I'll be

off, and out of England by to-morrow night, never to come back, and you'll have all my father's money."

"D'ye think I care for that?" said Bessy vehemently, feeling with trembling hands for the lock; "I wish there was noan such a thing as money i' the world, afore yo'd come to this. There, yo're free, and I charge yo' never to let me see your face again. I'd ne'er ha' let yo' loose but for fear o' breaking their hearts, if yo' hanna killed him already." But, before she had ended her speech, he was gone—off into the black darkness, leaving the door open wide. With a new terror in her mind, Bessy shut it afresh —shut it and bolted it this time. Then she sat down on the first chair, and relieved her soul by giving a great and exceeding bitter cry. But she knew it was no time for giving way; and, lifting herself up with as much effort as if each of her limbs was a heavy weight, she went into the back kitchen, and took a drink of cold water. To her surprise, she heard her uncle's voice saying feebly—

"Carry me up, and lay me by her."

But Bessy could not carry him; she could only help his faint exertions to walk upstairs; and, by the time he was there, sitting panting on the first chair she could find, John Kirkby and Atkinson returned. John came up now to her aid. Her aunt lay across the bed in a fainting-fit, and her uncle sat in so utterly broken-down a state that Bessy feared immediate death for both. But John cheered her up, and lifted the old man into his bed again; and, while Bessy tried to compose poor Hester's limbs into a position of rest, John went down to hunt about for the little store of gin which was always kept in a corner cupboard against emergencies.

"They've had a sore fright," said he, shaking his head, as he poured a little gin and hot water into their mouths with a tea-spoon, while Bessy chafed their cold feet; "and it and the cold have been welly too much for 'em, poor old folk!"

He looked tenderly at them, and Bessy blessed him in her heart for that look.

"I maun be off. I sent Atkinson up to th' farm for to bring down Bob, and Jack came wi' him back to th' shippon, for to look after t'other man. He began blackguarding us all round, so Bob and Jack were gagging him wi' bridles when I left."

"Ne'er give heed to what he says," cried poor Bessy, a new panic besetting her. "Folks o' his sort are allays for dragging other folk into their mischief. I'm right glad he were well gagged."

"Well! but what I were saying were this: Atkinson and me will take t'other chap, who seems quiet enough, to th' shippon, and it'll be one piece o' work for to mind them and the cow; and I'll saddle t' old bay mare and ride for constables and doctor fra' Highminster. I'll bring Dr. Preston up to see Nathan and Hester first; and then, I reckon, th' broken-legged chap down below must have his turn, for all as he's met wi' his misfortunes in a wrong line o' life."

"Ay!" said Bessy. "We maun ha' the doctor sure enough, for look at them how they lie—like two stone statues on a church monument, so sad and solemn!"

"There's a look o' sense come back into their faces though, sin' they supped that gin-and-water. I'd keep on a-bathing his head and giving them a sup on't fra' time to time, if I was you, Bessy."

Bessy followed him downstairs, and lighted the men out of the house. She dared not light them carrying their burden even, until they passed round the corner of the house; so strong was her fearful conviction that Benjamin was lurking near, seeking again to enter. She rushed back into the kitchen, bolted and barred the door, and pushed the end of the dresser against it, shutting her eyes as she passed the uncurtained window, for fear of catching a glimpse of a white face pressed against the glass, and gazing at her. The poor old couple lay quiet and speechless, although Hester's position had slightly altered: she had turned a little on her side towards her husband, and had laid one shrivelled arm around his neck. But he was just as Bessy had

left him, with the wet cloths around his head, his eyes not wanting in a certain intelligence, but solemn, and unconscious to all that was passing around as the eyes of death.

His wife spoke a little from time to time—said a word of thanks, perhaps, or so; but he, never. All the rest of that terrible night, Bessy tended the poor old couple with constant care, her own heart so stunned and bruised in its feelings that she went about her pious duties almost like one in a dream. The November morning was long in coming; nor did she perceive any change, either for the worse or the better, before the doctor came, about eight o'clock. John Kirkby brought him; and was full of the capture of the two burglars.

As far as Bessy could make out, the participation of that unnatural Third was unknown. It was a relief, almost sickening in the revulsion it gave her from her terrible fear, which now she felt had haunted and held possession of her all night long, and had, in fact, paralysed her from thinking. Now she felt and thought with acute and feverish vividness, owing, no doubt, in part, to the sleepless night she had passed. She felt almost sure that her uncle (possibly her aunt, too) had recognised Benjamin; but there was a faint chance that they had not done so, and wild horses should never tear the secret from her, nor should any inadvertent word betray the fact that there had been a third person concerned. As to Nathan, he had never uttered a word. It was her aunt's silence that made Bessy fear lest Hester knew, somehow, that her son was concerned.

The doctor examined them both closely; looked hard at the wound on Nathan's head; asked questions which Hester answered shortly and unwillingly, and Nathan not at all—shutting his eyes, as if even the sight of a stranger was pain to him. Bessy replied, in their stead, to all that she could answer respecting their state, and followed the doctor downstairs with a beating heart. When they came into the house-place, they found John had opened the outer door to let in

some fresh air, had brushed the hearth and made up the fire, and put the chairs and table in their right places. He reddened a little, as Bessy's eye fell upon his swollen and battered face, but tried to smile it off in a dry kind of way—

"Yo' see, I'm an ould bachelor, and I just thought as I'd redd up things a bit. How dun yo' find 'em, doctor?"

"Well, the poor old couple have had a terrible shock. I shall send them some soothing medicine to bring down the pulse, and a lotion for the old man's head. It is very well it bled so much; there might have been a good deal of inflammation." And so he went on, giving directions to Bessy for keeping them quietly in bed through the day. From these directions she gathered that they were not, as she had feared all night long, near to death. The doctor expected them to recover, though they would require care. She almost wished it had been otherwise, and that they, and she too, might have just lain down to their rest in the churchyard —so cruel did life seem to her; so dreadful the recollection of that subdued voice of the hidden robber smiting her with recognition.

All this time, John was getting things ready for breakfast, with something of the handiness of a woman. Bessy half-resented his officiousness in pressing Dr. Preston to have a cup of tea, she did so want him to be gone and leave her alone with her thoughts. She did not know that all was done for love of her; that the hard-featured, short-spoken John was thinking all the time how ill and miserable she looked, and trying with tender artifices to make it incumbent upon her sense of hospitality to share Dr. Preston's meal.

"I've seen as the cows is milked," said he, "yourn and all; and Atkinson's brought ours round fine. Whatten a marcy it were as she were sick this very night! Yon two chaps 'ud ha' made short work on't, if yo' hadna fetched us in; and, as it were, we had a sore tussle. One on 'em 'll bear the marks on't to his dying day, wunnot he, doctor?"

"He'll barely have his leg well enough to stand his trial

at York Assizes; they're coming off in a fortnight from now."

"Ay, and that reminds me, Bessy, yo'll have to go witness before Justice Royds. Constables bade me tell yo' and gie yo' this summons. Dunnot be feared: it will not be a long job, though I'm not saying as it'll be a pleasant one. Yo'll have to answer questions as to how, and all about it; and Jane" (his sister) "will come and stop wi' th' oud folks; and I'll drive yo' in the shandry."

No one knew why Bessy's colour blenched, and her eye clouded. No one knew how she apprehended lest she should have to say that Benjamin had been of the gang; if, indeed, in some way, the law had not followed on his heels quick enough to catch him.

But that trial was spared her; she was warned by John to answer questions, and say no more than was necessary, for fear of making her story less clear; and, as she was known, by character at least, to Justice Royds and his clerk, they made the examination as little formidable as possible.

When all was over, and John was driving her back again, he expressed his rejoicing that there would be evidence enough to convict the men, without summoning Nathan and Hester to identify them. Bessy was so tired that she hardly understood what an escape it was; how far greater than even her companion understood.

Jane Kirkby stayed with her for a week or more, and was an unspeakable comfort. Otherwise she sometimes thought she should have gone mad, with the face of her uncle always reminding her, in its stony expression of agony, of that fearful night. Her aunt was softer in her sorrow, as became one of her faithful and pious nature; but it was easy to see how her heart bled inwardly. She recovered her strength sooner than her husband; but, as she recovered, the doctor perceived the rapid approach of total blindness. Every day, nay, every hour of the day, that Bessy dared, without fear of exciting their suspicions of her knowledge, she told them, as she had anxiously told them at

first, that only two men, and those perfect strangers, had been discovered as being concerned in the burglary. Her uncle would never have asked a question about it, even if she had withheld all information respecting the affair; but she noticed the quick, watching, waiting glance of his eye, whenever she returned from any person or place where she might have been supposed to gain intelligence if Benjamin were suspected or caught: and she hastened to relieve the old man's anxiety, by always telling all that she had heard; thankful that, as the days passed on, the danger she sickened to think of grew less and less.

Day by day, Bessie had ground for thinking that her aunt knew more than she had apprehended at first. There was something so very humble and touching in Hester's blind way of feeling about for her husband—stern, woebegone Nathan—and mutely striving to console him in the deep agony of which Bessy learnt, from this loving, piteous manner, that her aunt was conscious. Her aunt's face looked blankly up into his, tears slowly running down from her sightless eyes; while from time to time, when she thought herself unheard by any save him, she would repeat such texts as she had heard at church in happier days, and which she thought, in her true, simple piety, might tend to console him. Yet, day by day, her aunt grew more and more sad.

Three or four days before assize-time, two summonses to attend the trial at York were sent to the old people. Neither Bessy, nor John, nor Jane, could understand this: for their own notices had come long before, and they had been told that their evidence would be enough to convict.

But, alas! the fact was, that the lawyer employed to defend the prisoners had heard from them that there was a third person engaged, and had heard who that third person was; and it was this advocate's business to diminish, if possible, the guilt of his clients, by proving that they were but tools in the hands of one who had, from his superior knowledge of the premises and the daily customs of the inhabitants, been the originator and planner of the whole

affair. To do this, it was necessary to have the evidence of the parents, who, as the prisoners had said, must have recognised the voice of the young man, their son. For no one knew that Bessy, too, could have borne witness to his having been present; and, as it was supposed that Benjamin had escaped out of England, there was no exact betrayal of him on the part of his accomplices.

Wondering, bewildered, and weary, the old couple reached York, in company with John and Bessy, on the eve of the day of trial. Nathan was still so self-contained that Bessy could never guess what had been passing in his mind. He was almost passive under his old wife's trembling caresses; he seemed hardly conscious of them, so rigid was his demeanour.

She, Bessy feared at times, was becoming childish; for she had evidently so great and anxious a love for her husband, that her memory seemed going in her endeavours to melt the stoniness of his aspect and manners; she appeared occasionally to have forgotten why he was so changed, in her piteous little attempts to bring him back to his former self.

"They'll, for sure, never torture them, when they see what old folks they are!" cried Bessy, on the morning of the trial, a dim fear looming over her mind. "They'll never be so cruel, for sure?"

But "for sure" it was so. The barrister looked up at the judge, almost apologetically, as he saw how hoary-headed and woeful an old man was put into the witness-box, when the defence came on, and Nathan Huntroyd was called on for his evidence.

"It is necessary, on behalf of my clients, my lord, that I should pursue a course which, for all other reasons, I deplore."

"Go on!" said the judge. "What is right and legal must be done." But, an old man himself, he covered his quivering mouth with his hand as Nathan, with grey, unmoved face, and solemn, hollow eyes, placing his two hands

on each side of the witness-box, prepared to give his answers to questions, the nature of which he was beginning to foresee, but would not shrink from replying to truthfully; "the very stones" (as he said to himself, with a kind of dulled sense of the Eternal Justice) "rise up against such a sinner."

"Your name is Nathan Huntroyd, I believe?"

"It is."

"You live at Nab-End Farm?"

"I do."

"Do you remember the night of November the twelfth?"

"Yes."

"You were awakened that night by some noise, I believe. What was it?"

The old man's eyes fixed themselves upon his questioner with the look of a creature brought to bay. That look the barrister never forgets. It will haunt him till his dying day.

"It was a throwing-up of stones against our window."

"Did you hear it at first?"

"No."

"What awakened you, then?"

"She did."

"And then you both heard the stones. Did you hear nothing else?"

A long pause. Then a low, clear "Yes."

"What?"

"Our Benjamin asking us for to let him in. She said as it were him, leastways."

"And you thought it was him, did you not?"

"I told her" (this time in a louder voice) "for to get to sleep, and not be thinking that every drunken chap as passed by were our Benjamin, for that he were dead and gone."

"And she?"

"She said as though she'd heerd our Benjamin, afore she were welly awake, axing for to be let in. But I bade her ne'er heed her dreams, but turn on her other side and get to sleep again."

"And did she?"

A long pause—judge, jury, bar, audience, all held their breath. At length Nathan said—

"No!"

"What did you do then? (My lord, I am compelled to ask these painful questions.)"

"I saw she wadna be quiet: she had allays thought he would come back to us, like the Prodigal i' th' Gospels." (His voice choked a little; but he tried to make it steady, succeeded, and went on.) "She said, if I wadna get up, she would; and just then I heerd a voice. I'm not quite mysel, gentlemen—I've been ill and i' bed, an' it makes me trembling-like. Some one said, 'Father, mother, I'm here, starving i' the cold—wunnot yo' get up and let me in?'"

"And that voice was——?"

"It were like our Benjamin's. I see whatten yo're driving at, sir, and I'll tell yo' truth, though it kills me to speak it. I dunnot say it were our Benjamin as spoke, mind yo'—I only say it were like"——

"That's all I want, my good fellow. And on the strength of that entreaty, spoken in your son's voice, you went down and opened the door to these two prisoners at the bar, and to a third man?"

Nathan nodded assent, and even that counsel was too merciful to force him to put more into words.

"Call Hester Huntroyd."

An old woman, with a face of which the eyes were evidently blind, with a sweet, gentle, careworn face, came into the witness-box, and meekly curtseyed to the presence of those whom she had been taught to respect—a presence she could not see.

There was something in her humble, blind aspect, as she stood waiting to have something done to her—what her poor troubled mind hardly knew—that touched all who saw her, inexpressibly. Again the counsel apologised, but the judge could not reply in words; his face was quivering all over, and the jury looked uneasily at the prisoner's counsel. That gentleman saw that he might go too far, and send their

sympathies off on the other side; but one or two questions he must ask. So, hastily recapitulating much that he had learned from Nathan, he said, "You believed it was your son's voice asking to be let in?"

"Ay! Our Benjamin came home, I'm sure; choose where he is gone."

She turned her head about, as if listening for the voice of her child, in the hushed silence of the court.

"Yes; he came home that night—and your husband went down to let him in?"

"Well! I believe he did. There was a great noise of folk downstair."

"And you heard your son Benjamin's voice among the others?"

"Is it to do him harm, sir?" asked she, her face growing more intelligent and intent on the business in hand.

"That is not my object in questioning you. I believe he has left England; so nothing you can say will do him any harm. You heard your son's voice, I say?"

"Yes, sir. For sure I did."

"And some men came upstairs into your room? What did they say?"

"They axed where Nathan kept his stocking."

"And you—did you tell them?"

"No, sir, for I knew Nathan would not like me to."

"What did you do then?"

A shade of reluctance came over her face, as if she began to perceive causes and consequences.

"I just screamed on Bessy—that's my niece, sir."

"And you heard some one shout out from the bottom of the stairs?"

She looked piteously at him, but did not answer.

"Gentlemen of the jury, I wish to call your particular attention to this fact: she acknowledges she heard some one shout—some third person, you observe—shout out to the two above. What did he say? That is the last question I

shall trouble you with. What did the third person, left behind, downstairs, say?"

Her face worked—her mouth opened two or three times as if to speak—she stretched out her arms imploringly; but no word came, and she fell back into the arms of those nearest to her. Nathan forced himself forward into the witness-box—

"My Lord Judge, a woman bore ye, as I reckon; it's a cruel shame to serve a mother so. It wur my son, my only child, as called out for us t' open door, and who shouted out for to hold th' oud woman's throat if she did na stop her noise, when hoo'd fain ha' cried for her niece to help. And now yo've truth, and a' th' truth, and I'll leave yo' to th' judgment o' God for th' way yo've getten at it."

Before night the mother was stricken with paralysis, and lay on her death-bed. But the broken-hearted go Home, to be comforted of God.

CURIOUS IF TRUE

(Extract from a Letter from Richard Whittingham, Esq.)

You were formerly so much amused at my pride in my descent from that sister of Calvin's who married a Whittingham, Dean of Durham, that I doubt if you will be able to enter into the regard for my distinguished relation that has led me to France, in order to examine registers and archives, which I thought might enable me to discover collateral descendants of the great Reformer, with whom I might call cousins. I shall not tell you of my troubles and adventures in this research; you are not worthy to hear of them; but something so curious befell me one evening last August, that if I had not been perfectly certain I was wide awake, I might have taken it for a dream.

For the purpose I have named, it was necessary that I should make Tours my headquarters for a time. I had traced descendants of the Calvin family out of Normandy into the centre of France; but I found it was necessary to have a kind of permission from the bishop of the diocese, before I could see certain family papers, which had fallen into the possession of the Church; and, as I had several English friends at Tours, I awaited an answer to my request from Monseigneur de ——, at that town. I was ready to accept any invitation; but I received very few, and was sometimes a little at a loss what to do with my evenings. The *table-d'hôte* was at five o'clock; I did not wish to go to the expense of a private sitting-room, disliked the dinnery atmosphere of

the *salle à manger*, could not play either at pool or billiards, and the aspect of my fellow-guests was unprepossessing enough to make me unwilling to enter into any *tête-à-tête* gamblings with them. So I usually rose from table early, and tried to make the most of the remaining light of the August evenings in walking briskly off to explore the surrounding country; the middle of the day was too hot for this purpose, and better employed in lounging on a bench in the Boulevards, lazily listening to the distant band, and noticing with equal laziness the faces and figures of the women who passed by.

One Thursday evening—the 18th of August it was, I think—I had gone further than usual in my walk, and I found that it was later than I had imagined when I paused to turn back. I fancied I could make a round; I had enough notion of the direction in which I was to see that, by turning up a narrow straight lane to my left, I should shorten my way back to Tours. And so I believe I should have done, could I have found an outlet at the right place; but field-paths are almost unknown in that part of France, and my lane, stiff and straight as any street, and marked into terribly vanishing perspective by the regular row of poplars on each side, seemed interminable. Of course night came on, and I was in darkness. In England I might have had a chance of seeing a light in some cottage only a field or two off, and asking my way from the inhabitants; but here I could see no such welcome sight; indeed, I believe French peasants go to bed with the summer daylight; so, if there were any habitations in the neighbourhood, I never saw them. At last —I believe I must have walked two hours in the darkness— I saw the dusky outline of a wood on one side of the weariful lane; and, impatiently careless of all forest laws and penalties for trespassers, I made my way to it, thinking that, if the worst came to the worst, I could find some covert—some shelter where I could lie down and rest, until the morning light gave me a chance of finding my way back to Tours. But the plantation, on the outskirts of what appeared to me

a dense wood, was of young trees, too closely-planted to be more than slender stems growing up to a good height, with scanty foliage on their summits. On I went towards the thicker forest; and, once there, I slackened my pace, and began to look about me for a good lair. I was as dainty as Lochiel's grandchild, who made his grandsire indignant at the luxury of his pillow of snow: this brake was too full of brambles, that felt damp with dew; there was no hurry, since I had given up all hope of passing the night between four walls; and I went leisurely groping about, and trusting that there were no wolves to be poked up out of their summer drowsiness by my stick—when, all at once, I saw a château before me, not a quarter of a mile off, at the end of what seemed to be an ancient avenue (now overgrown and irregular), which I happened to be crossing, when I looked to my right and saw the welcome sight. Large, stately, and dark was its outline against the dusky night-sky; there were pepper-boxes, and *tourelles*, and what not, fantastically growing up into the dim starlight. And, more to the purpose still, though I could not see the details of the building that I was now facing, it was plain enough that there were lights in many windows, as if some great entertainment was going on.

"They are hospitable people, at any rate," thought I. "Perhaps they will give me a bed. I don't suppose French *propriétaires* have traps and horses quite as plentiful as English country-gentlemen; but they are evidently having a large party, and some of their guests may be from Tours, and will give me a cast back to the 'Lion d'Or.' I am not proud, and I am dog-tired. I am not above hanging on behind, if need be."

So, putting a little briskness and spirit into my walk, I went up to the door, which was standing open, most hospitably, and showing a large lighted hall, all hung round with spoils of the chase, armour, &c., the details of which I had not time to notice; for the instant I stood on the threshold a huge porter appeared, in a strange, old-fashioned dress—a kind of livery which well befitted the general appearance of

the house. He asked me, in French (so curiously pronounced that I thought I had hit upon a new kind of *patois*), my name, and whence I came. I thought he would not be much the wiser—still, it was but civil to give it before I made my request for assistance; so, in reply, I said—

"My name is Whittingham—Richard Whittingham, an English gentleman, staying at ——." To my infinite surprise, a light of pleased intelligence came over the giant's face; he made me a low bow, and said (still in the same curious dialect) that I was welcome, that I was long expected.

"Long expected!" What could the fellow mean? Had I stumbled on a nest of relations by John Calvin's side, who had heard of my genealogical inquiries, and were gratified and interested by them? But I was too much pleased to be under shelter for the night to think it necessary to account for my agreeable reception before I enjoyed it. Just as he was opening the great heavy *battants* of the door that led from the hall to the interior, he turned round and said—

"Apparently Monsieur le Géanquilleur is not come with you?"

"No! I am all alone. I have lost my way"—and I was going on with my explanation, when he, as if quite indifferent to it, led the way up a great stone staircase, as wide as many rooms, and having on each landing-place massive iron wickets in a heavy framework; these the porter unlocked with the solemn slowness of age. Indeed, a strange, mysterious awe of the centuries that had passed away since this château was built, came over me, as I waited for the turning of the ponderous keys in the ancient locks. I could almost have fancied that I heard a mighty rushing murmur (like the ceaseless sound of a distant sea, ebbing and flowing for ever and for ever), coming forth from the great vacant galleries that opened out on each side of the broad staircase, and were to be dimly perceived in the darkness above us. It was as if the voices of generations of men yet echoed and eddied in the silent air. It was strange, too, that my friend the porter going before me, ponderously

infirm, with his feeble old hands striving in vain to keep the tall flambeau he held steadily before him—strange, I say, that he was the only domestic I saw in the vast halls and passages, or met with on the grand staircase. At length, we stood before the gilded doors that led into the saloon where the family—or it might be the company, so great was the buzz of voices—was assembled. I would have remonstrated, when I found he was going to introduce me, dusty and travel-smeared, in a morning costume that was not even my best, into this grand *salon*, with nobody knew how many ladies and gentlemen assembled; but the obstinate old man was evidently bent upon taking me straight to his master, and paid no heed to my words.

The doors flew open; and I was ushered into a saloon curiously full of pale light, which did not culminate on any spot, nor proceed from any centre, nor flicker with any motion of the air, but filled every nook and corner, making all things deliciously distinct; different from our light of gas or candle, as is the difference between a clear southern atmosphere and that of our misty England.

At the first moment, my arrival excited no attention, the apartment was so full of people, all intent on their own conversation. But my friend the porter went up to a handsome lady of middle age, richly attired in that antique manner which fashion has brought round again of late years, and, waiting first in an attitude of deep respect till her attention fell upon him, told her my name and something about me, as far as I could guess from the gestures of the one and the sudden glance of the eye of the other.

She immediately came towards me with the most friendly actions of greeting, even before she had advanced near enough to speak. Then—and was it not strange?—her words and accent were those of the commonest peasant of the country. Yet she herself looked high-bred, and would have been dignified, had she been a shade less restless; had her countenance worn a little less lively and inquisitive expression. I had been poking a good deal about the old parts

of Tours, and had had to understand the dialect of the people who dwelt in the Marché au Vendredi and similar places; or I really should not have understood my handsome hostess as she offered to present me to her husband, a hen-pecked, gentlemanly man, who was more quaintly attired than she in the very extreme of that style of dress. I thought to myself that in France, as in England, it is the provincials who carry fashion to such an excess as to become ridiculous.

However, he spoke (still in the *patois*) of his pleasure in making my acquaintance, and led me to a strange uneasy easy-chair, much of a piece with the rest of the furniture, which might have taken its place without any anachronism by the side of that in the Hôtel Cluny. Then again began the clatter of French voices, which my arrival had for an instant interrupted, and I had leisure to look about me. Opposite to me sat a very sweet-looking lady, who must have been a great beauty in her youth, I should think, and would be charming in old age, from the sweetness of her countenance. She was, however, extremely fat, and, on seeing her feet laid up before her on a cushion, I at once perceived that they were so swollen as to render her incapable of walking, which probably brought on her excessive *embonpoint*. Her hands were plump and small, but rather coarse-grained in texture, not quite so clean as they might have been, and altogether not so aristocratic-looking as the charming face. Her dress was of superb black velvet, ermine-trimmed, with diamonds thrown all abroad over it.

Not far from her stood the least little man I had ever seen, of such admirable proportions no one could call him a dwarf, because with that word we usually associate something of deformity; but yet with an elfin look of shrewd, hard, worldly wisdom in his face that marred the impression which his delicate regular little features would otherwise have conveyed. Indeed, I do not think he was quite of equal rank with the rest of the company, for his dress was inappropriate to the occasion (and he apparently was an invited, while I was an involuntary, guest;) and one or two

of his gestures and actions were more like the tricks of an uneducated rustic than anything else. To explain what I mean: his boots had evidently seen much service, and had been re-topped, re-heeled, re-soled to the extent of cobbler's powers. Why should he have come in them if they were not his best—his only pair? And what can be more ungenteel than poverty! Then, again, he had an uneasy trick of putting his hand up to his throat, as if he expected to find something the matter with it; and he had the awkward habit—which I do not think he could have copied from Dr. Johnson, because most probably he had never heard of him—of trying always to retrace his steps on the exact boards on which he had trodden to arrive at any particular part of the room. Besides, to settle the question, I once heard him addressed as Monsieur Poucet, without any aristocratic "de" for a prefix; and nearly every one else in the room was a marquis, at any rate.

I say "nearly every one," for some strange people had the *entrée;* unless, indeed, they were, like me, benighted. One of the guests I should have taken for a servant, but for the extraordinary influence he seemed to have over the man I took for his master, and who never did anything without, apparently, being urged thereto by this follower. The master, magnificently dressed, but ill at ease in his clothes, as if they had been made for some one else, was a weak-looking, handsome man, continually sauntering about, and, I almost guessed, an object of suspicion to some of the gentlemen present; which, perhaps, drove him on the companionship of his follower, who was dressed something in the style of an ambassador's chasseur; yet it was not a chasseur's dress after all; it was something more thoroughly old-world; boots half-way up his ridiculously small legs, which clattered as he walked along, as if they were too large for his little feet; and a great quantity of grey fur, as trimming to coat, court-mantle, boots, cap—everything. You know the way in which certain countenances remind you perpetually of some animal, be it bird or beast! Well, this

chasseur (as I will call him, for want of a better name) was exceedingly like the great Tom-cat that you have seen so often in my chambers, and laughed at, almost as often, for his uncanny gravity of demeanour. Grey whiskers has my Tom —grey whiskers had the chasseur; grey hair overshadows the upper lip of my Tom—grey mustachios hid that of the chasseur. The pupils of Tom's eyes dilate and contract as I had thought cats' pupils only could do, until I saw those of the chasseur. To be sure, canny as Tom is, the chasseur had the advantage in the more intelligent expression. He seemed to have obtained most complete sway over his master or patron, whose looks he watched, and whose steps he followed, with a kind of distrustful interest that puzzled me greatly.

There were several other groups in the more distant part of the saloon, all of the stately old school, all grand and noble, I conjectured from their bearing. They seemed perfectly well acquainted with each other, as if they were in the habit of meeting. But I was interrupted in my observations by the tiny little gentleman on the opposite side of the room coming across to take a place beside me. It is no difficult matter to a Frenchman to slide into conversation; and so gracefully did my pigmy friend keep up the character of the nation, that we were almost confidential before ten minutes had elapsed.

Now I was quite aware that the welcome which all had extended to me, from the porter up to the vivacious lady and meek lord of the castle, was intended for some other person. But it required either a degree of moral courage, of which I cannot boast, or the self-reliance and conversational powers of a bolder and cleverer man than I, to undeceive people who had fallen into so fortunate a mistake for me. Yet the little man by my side insinuated himself so much into my confidence that I had half a mind to tell him of my exact situation, and to turn him into a friend and an ally.

"Madame is perceptibly growing older," said he in the midst of my perplexity, glancing at our hostess.

"Madame is still a very fine woman," replied I.

"Now, is it not strange," continued he, lowering his voice, "how women almost invariably praise the absent, or departed, as if they were angels of light? while, as for the present, or the living"—here he shrugged up his little shoulders and made an expressive pause. "Would you believe it! Madame is always praising her late husband to monsieur's face; till, in fact, we guests are quite perplexed how to look: for, you know, the late M. de Retz's character was quite notorious—everybody has heard of him." All the world of Touraine, thought I; but I made an assenting noise.

At this instant, monsieur our host came up to me, and, with a civil look of tender interest (such as some people put on when they inquire after your mother, about whom they do not care one straw), asked if I had heard lately how my cat was? "How my cat was!" What could the man mean? My cat! Could he mean the tail-less Tom, born in the Isle of Man, and now supposed to be keeping guard against the incursions of rats and mice into my chambers in London? Tom is, as you know, on pretty good terms with some of my friends, using their legs for rubbing-posts without scruple, and highly esteemed by them for his gravity of demeanour, and wise manner of winking his eyes. But could his fame have reached across the Channel? However, an answer must be returned to the inquiry, as monsieur's face was bent down to mine with a look of polite anxiety; so I, in my turn, assumed an expression of gratitude, and assured him that, to the best of my belief, my cat was in remarkably good health.

"And the climate agrees with her?"

"Perfectly," said I, in a maze of wonder at this deep solicitude in a tail-less cat, who had lost one foot and half an ear in some cruel trap. My host smiled a sweet smile, and, addressing a few words to my little neighbour, passed on.

"How wearisome those aristocrats are!" quoth my neighbour, with a slight sneer. "Monsieur's conversation rarely extends to more than two sentences to any one. By

that time his faculties are exhausted, and he needs the refreshment of silence. You and I, monsieur, are, at any rate, indebted to our own wits for our rise in the world!"

Here again I was bewildered! As you know, I am rather proud of my descent from families which, if not noble themselves, are allied to nobility; and as to my "rise in the world"—if I had risen, it would have been rather for balloon-like qualities than for mother-wit, being unincumbered with heavy ballast either in my head or my pockets. However, it was my cue to agree: so I smiled again.

"For my part," said he, "if a man does not stick at trifles; if he knows how to judiciously add to, or withhold facts, and is not sentimental in his parade of humanity, he is sure to do well; sure to affix a *de* or *von* to his name, and end his days in comfort. There is an example of what I am saying"—and he glanced furtively at the weak-looking master of the sharp, intelligent servant, whom I have called the chasseur.

"Monsieur le Marquis would never have been anything but a miller's son, if it had not been for the talents of his servant. Of course you know his antecedents?"

I was going to make some remarks on the changes in the order of the peerage since the days of Louis XVI.—going, in fact, to be very sensible and historical—when there was a slight commotion among the people at the other end of the room. Lacqueys in quaint liveries must have come in from behind the tapestry, I suppose (for I never saw them enter, though I sate right opposite to the doors), and were handing about the slight beverages with slighter viands which are considered sufficient refreshments, but which looked rather meagre to my hungry appetite. These footmen were standing solemnly opposite to a lady—beautiful, splendid as the dawn, but—sound asleep in a magnificent settee. A gentleman, who showed so much irritation at her ill-timed slumbers, that I think he must have been her husband, was trying to awaken her with actions not far removed from shakings. All in vain; she was quite

unconscious of his annoyance, or the smiles of the company, or the automatic solemnity of the waiting footman, or the perplexed anxiety of monsieur and madame.

My little friend sat down with a sneer, as if his curiosity was quenched in contempt.

"Moralists would make an infinity of wise remarks on that scene," said he. "In the first place, note the ridiculous position into which their superstitious reverence for rank and title puts all these people. Because monsieur is a reigning prince over some minute principality, the exact situation of which no one has as yet discovered, no one must venture to take their glass of *eau sucré* till Madame la Princesse awakens; and, judging from past experience, those poor lacqueys may have to stand for a century before that happens. Next—always speaking as a moralist, you will observe—note how difficult it is to break off bad habits acquired in youth!"

Just then the prince succeeded, by what means I did not see, in awaking the beautiful sleeper. But, at first, she did not remember where she was; and, looking up at her husband with loving eyes, she smiled, and said—

"Is it you, my prince?"

But he was too conscious of the suppressed amusement of the spectators, and his own consequent annoyance, to be reciprocally tender, and turned away with some little French expression, best rendered into English by "Pooh, pooh, my dear!"

After I had had a glass of delicious wine of some unknown quality, my courage was in rather better plight than before, and I told my cynical little neighbour—whom I must say I was beginning to dislike—that I had lost my way in the wood, and had arrived at the château quite by mistake.

He seemed mightily amused at my story; said that the same thing had happened to himself more than once; and told me that I had better luck than he had on one of these occasions, when, from his account, he must have been in considerable danger of his life. He ended his story by

making me admire his boots, which he said he still wore, patched though they were, and all their excellent quality lost by patching, because they were of such a first-rate make for long pedestrian excursions. "Though, indeed," he wound up by saying, "the new fashion of railroads would seem to supersede the necessity for this description of boots."

When I consulted him as to whether I ought to make myself known to my host and hostess as a benighted traveller, instead of the guest whom they had taken me for, he exclaimed, "By no means! I hate such squeamish morality." And he seemed much offended by my innocent question, as if it seemed by implication to condemn something in himself. He was offended and silent; and just at this moment I caught the sweet, attractive eyes of the lady opposite—that lady whom I named at first as being no longer in the bloom of youth, but as being somewhat infirm about the feet, which were supported on a raised cushion before her. Her looks seemed to say, "Come here, and let us have some conversation together;" and, with a bow of silent excuse to my little companion, I went across to the lame old lady. She acknowledged my coming with the prettiest gesture of thanks possible; and, half-apologetically, said—"It is a little dull to be unable to move about on such evenings as this; but it is a just punishment to me for my early vanities. My poor feet, that were by nature so small, are now taking their revenge for my cruelty in forcing them into such little slippers. . . . Besides, monsieur," with a pleasant smile, "I thought it was possible you might be weary of the malicious sayings of your little neighbour. He has not borne the best character in his youth, and such men are sure to be cynical in their old age."

"Who is he?" asked I, with English abruptness.

"His name is Poucet, and his father was, I believe, a wood-cutter, or charcoal-burner, or something of the sort. They do tell sad stories of connivance at murder, ingratitude, and obtaining money on false pretences—but you will think me as bad as he if I go on with my slanders. Rather let

us admire the lovely lady coming up towards us, with the roses in her hand—I never see her without roses, they are so closely connected with her past history, as you are doubtless aware. Ah, beauty!" said my companion to the lady drawing near to us, "it is like you to come to me, now that I can no longer go to you." Then, turning to me, and gracefully drawing me into the conversation, she said, "You must know that, although we never met until we were both married, we have been almost like sisters ever since. There have been so many points of resemblance in our circumstances, and I think I may say in our characters. We had each two elder sisters—mine were but half-sisters, though—who were not so kind to us as they might have been."

"But have been sorry for it since," put in the other lady.

"Since we have married princes," continued the same lady, with an arch smile that had nothing of unkindness in it, "—for we both have married far above our original stations in life—we are both unpunctual in our habits; and, in consequence of this failing of ours, we have both had to suffer mortification and pain."

"And both are charming," said a whisper close behind me, "My lord the marquis, say it—say, 'And both are charming.'"

"And both are charming," was spoken aloud by another voice. I turned, and saw the wily, cat-like chasseur prompting his master to make civil speeches.

The ladies bowed, with that kind of haughty acknowledgment which shows that compliments from such a source are distasteful. But our trio of conversation was broken up, and I was sorry for it. The marquis looked as if he had been stirred up to make that one speech, and hoped that he would not be expected to say more; while behind him stood the chasseur, half-impertinent and half-servile in his ways and attitudes. The ladies, who were real ladies, seemed to be sorry for the awkwardness of the marquis, and addressed some trifling questions to him, adapting themselves to the subjects on which he could have no trouble in answering.

The chasseur, meanwhile, was talking to himself in a growling tone of voice. I had fallen a little into the background at this interruption in a conversation which promised to be so pleasant, and I could not help hearing his words.

"Really, De Carabas grows more stupid every day. I have a great mind to throw off his boots, and leave him to his fate. I was intended for a court, and to a court I will go, and make my own fortune as I have made his. The emperor will appreciate my talents."

And such are the habits of the French, or such his forgetfulness of good manners in his anger, that he spat right and left on the parquetted floor.

Just then a very ugly, very pleasant-looking man, came towards the two ladies to whom I had lately been speaking, leading up to them a delicate, fair woman, dressed all in the softest white, as if she were *'vouée au blanc.* I do not think there was a bit of colour about her. I thought I had heard her making, as she came along, a little noise of pleasure, not exactly like the singing of a tea-kettle, nor yet like the cooing of a dove, but reminding me of each sound.

"Madame de Mioumiou was anxious to see you," said he, addressing the lady with the roses, "so I have brought her across to give you a pleasure!" What an honest, good face! but oh! how ugly! And yet I liked his ugliness better than most persons' beauty. There was a look of pathetic acknowledgment of his ugliness, and a deprecation of your too hasty judgment, in his countenance, that was positively winning. The soft, white lady kept glancing at my neighbour the chasseur, as if they had had some former acquaintance; which puzzled me very much, as they were of such different rank. However, their nerves were evidently strung to the same tune; for at a sound behind the tapestry, which was more like the scuttering of rats and mice than anything else, both Madame de Mioumiou and the chasseur started with the most eager look of anxiety on their countenances, and by their restless movements—madame's panting, and the fiery dilation of his eyes—one might see that commonplace

sounds affected them both in a manner very different to the rest of the company. The ugly husband of the lovely lady with the roses now addressed himself to me—

"We are much disappointed," he said, "in finding that Monsieur is not accompanied by his countryman—le grand Jean d'Angleterre; I cannot pronounce his name rightly"—and he looked at me to help him out.

"'Le grand Jean d'Angleterre!'" now, who was 'le grand Jean d'Angleterre'? John Bull? John Russell? John Bright?

"Jean—Jean"—continued the gentleman, seeing my embarrassment. "Ah, these terrible English names—'Jean de Géanquilleur!'"

I was as wise as ever. And yet the name struck me as familiar, but slightly disguised. I repeated it to myself. It was mighty like John the Giant-killer; only his friends always call that worthy "Jack." I said the name aloud.

"Ah, that is it!" said he. "But why has he not accompanied you to our little *réunion* to-night?"

I had been rather puzzled once or twice before, but this serious question added considerably to my perplexity. Jack the Giant-killer had once, it is true, been rather an intimate friend of mine, as far as (printer's) ink and paper can keep up a friendship, but I had not heard his name mentioned for years; and for aught I knew he lay enchanted with King Arthur's knights, who lie entranced, until the blast of the trumpets of four mighty kings shall call them to help at England's need. But the question had been asked in serious earnest by that gentleman, whom I more wished to think well of me than I did any other person in the room. So I answered respectfully, that it was long since I had heard anything of my countryman; but that I was sure it would have given him as much pleasure as it was doing myself to have been present at such an agreeable gathering of friends. He bowed, and then the lame lady took up the word.

"To-night is the night, when, of all the year, this great old forest surrounding the castle is said to be haunted by the phantom of a little peasant-girl who once lived hereabouts; the tradition is that she was devoured by a wolf. In former days I have seen her on this night out of yonder window at the end of the gallery. Will you, ma belle, take monsieur to see the view outside by the moonlight (you may possibly see the phantom-child); and leave me to a little *tête-à-tête* with your husband?"

With a gentle movement the lady with the roses complied with the other's request, and we went to a great window, looking down on the forest, in which I had lost my way. The tops of the far-spreading and leafy trees lay motionless beneath us in that pale, wan light, which shows objects almost as distinct in form, though not in colour, as by day. We looked down on the countless avenues which seemed to converge from all quarters to the great old castle; and suddenly across one, quite near to us, there passed the figure of a little girl with the "capuchon" on, that takes the place of a peasant girl's bonnet in France. She had a basket on one arm, and by her, on the side to which her head was turned, there went a wolf. I could almost have said it was licking her hand, as if in penitent love, if either penitence or love had ever been a quality of wolves; but though not of living, perhaps it may be of phantom wolves.

"There, we have seen her!" exclaimed my beautiful companion. "Though so long dead, her simple story of household goodness and trustful simplicity still lingers in the hearts of all who have ever heard of her; and the country-people about here say that seeing the phantom-child on this anniversary brings good luck for the year. Let us hope that we shall share in the traditionary good fortune! Ah! here is Madame de Retz—she retains the name of her first husband, you know, as he was of higher rank than the present." We were joined by our hostess.

"If monsieur is fond of the beauties of nature and art," said she, perceiving that I had been looking at the view from

the great window, "he will perhaps take pleasure in seeing the picture." Here she sighed, with a little affectation of grief. "You know the picture I allude to?" addressing my companion, who bowed assent and smiled a little maliciously, as I followed the lead of madame.

I went after her to the other end of the saloon, noting by the way with what keen curiosity she caught up what was passing either in word or action on each side of her. When we stood opposite to the end-wall, I perceived a full-length picture of a handsome, peculiar-looking man, with—in spite of his good looks—a very fierce and scowling expression. My hostess clasped her hands together as her arms hung down in front, and sighed once more. Then, half in soliloquy, she said—

"He was the love of my youth; his stern, yet manly character first touched this heart of mine. When—when shall I cease to deplore his loss?"

Not being acquainted with her enough to answer this question (if indeed it were not sufficiently answered by the fact of her second marriage), I felt awkward; and, by way of saying something, I remarked—

"The countenance strikes me as resembling something I have seen before—in an engraving from an historical picture, I think; only, it is there the principal figure in a group; he is holding a lady by her hair, and threatening her with his scimitar, while two cavaliers are rushing up the stairs, apparently only just in time to save her life."

"Alas, alas!" said she, "you too accurately describe a miserable passage in my life, which has often been represented in a false light. The best of husbands"—here she sobbed, and became slightly inarticulate with her grief—"will sometimes be displeased. I was young and curious—he was justly angry with my disobedience—my brothers were too hasty—the consequence is, I became a widow.

After due respect for her tears, I ventured to suggest some commonplace consolation. She turned round sharply—

"No, monsieur; my only comfort is that I have never

forgiven the brothers who interfered so cruelly, in such an uncalled-for manner, between my dear husband and myself. To quote my friend, Monsieur Sganarelle—'Ce sont les petites choses qui sont de temps en temps nécessaires dans l'amitié; et cinq ou six coups d'épée entre gens qui s'aiment ne font que ragaillardir l'affection.' You observe, the colouring is not quite what it should be."

"In this light the beard is of rather a peculiar tint," said I.

"Yes; the painter did not do it justice. It was most lovely, and gave him such a distinguished air, quite different from the common herd. Stay, I will show you the exact colour, if you will come near this flambeau!" And going near the light, she took off a bracelet of hair, with a magnificent clasp of pearls. It was peculiar, certainly. I did not know what to say. "His precious, lovely beard!" said she. "And the pearls go so well with the delicate blue!"

Her husband, who had come up to us, and waited till her eye fell upon him before venturing to speak, now said, "It is strange Monsieur Ogre is not yet arrived!"

"Not at all strange," said she tartly. "He was always very stupid, and constantly falls into mistakes, in which he comes worse off; and it is very well he does, for he is a credulous and cowardly fellow. Not at all strange! If you will"—turning to her husband, so that I hardly heard her words, until I caught—"Then everybody would have their rights, and we should have no more trouble. Is it not, monsieur?" addressing me.

"If I were in England, I should imagine madame was speaking of the Reform Bill, or the millennium; but I am in ignorance."

And, just as I spoke, the great folding doors were thrown open wide; and every one started to their feet, to greet a little old lady, leaning on a thin black wand—and—

"Madame la Fée-marraine," was announced by a chorus of sweet shrill voices.

And in a moment I was lying in the grass close by a hollow oak-tree, with the slanting glory of the dawning day shining full in my face, and thousands of little birds and delicate insects piping and warbling out their welcome to the ruddy splendour.

RIGHT AT LAST

Doctor Brown was poor, and had to make his way in the world. He had gone to study his profession in Edinburgh, and his energy, ability, and good conduct had entitled him to some notice on the part of the professors. Once introduced to the ladies of their families, his prepossessing appearance and pleasing manners made him a universal favourite; and perhaps no other student received so many invitations to dancing- and evening-parties, or was so often singled out to fill up an odd vacancy at the last moment at the dinner-table. No one knew particularly who he was, or where he sprang from; but then he had no near relations, as he had once or twice observed; so he was evidently not hampered with low-born or low-bred connections. He had been in mourning for his mother, when he first came to college.

All this much was recalled to the recollection of Professor Frazer by his niece Margaret, as she stood before him one morning in his study; telling him, in a low, but resolute voice that, the night before, Doctor James Brown had offered her marriage—that she had accepted him—and that he was intending to call on Professer Frazer (her uncle and natural guardian) that very morning, to obtain his consent to their engagement. Professor Frazer was perfectly aware, from Margaret's manner, that his consent was regarded by her as a mere form, for that her mind was made up: and he had more than once had occasion to find out how inflexible she could be. Yet he, too, was of the same blood, and held to his own opinions in the same obdurate manner. The

consequence of which frequently was, that uncle and niece had argued themselves into mutual bitterness of feeling, without altering each other's opinions one jot. But Professor Frazer could not restrain himself on this occasion, of all others.

"Then, Margaret, you will just quietly settle down to be a beggar, for that lad Brown has little or no money to think of marrying upon: you that might be my Lady Kennedy, if you would!"

"I could not, uncle."

"Nonsense, child! Sir Alexander is a personable and agreeable man—middle-aged, if you will—well, a wilful woman maun have her way; but, if I had had a notion that this youngster was sneaking into my house to cajole you into fancying him, I would have seen him far enough before I had ever let your aunt invite him to dinner. Ay! you may mutter; but I say, no gentleman would ever have come into my house to seduce my niece's affections, without first informing me of his intentions, and asking my leave."

"Doctor Brown is a gentleman, Uncle Frazer, whatever you may think of him."

"So you think—so you think. But who cares for the opinion of a love-sick girl? He is a handsome, plausible young fellow, of good address. And I don't mean to deny his ability. But there is something about him I never did like, and now it's accounted for. And Sir Alexander——Well, well! your aunt will be disappointed in you, Margaret. But you were always a headstrong girl. Has this Jamie Brown ever told you who or what his parents were, or where he comes from? I don't ask about his forbears, for he does not look like a lad who has ever had ancestors; and you a Frazer of Lovat! Fie, for shame, Margaret! Who is this Jamie Brown?"

"He is James Brown, Doctor of Medicine of the University of Edinburgh: a good, clever young man, whom I love with my whole heart," replied Margaret, reddening.

"Hoot! is that the way for a maiden to speak? Where does he come from? Who are his kinsfolk? Unless he can give a pretty good account of his family and prospects,

I shall just bid him begone, Margaret; and that I tell you fairly."

"Uncle" (her eyes were filling with hot indignant tears), "I am of age; you know he is good and clever; else why have you had him so often to your house? I marry him, and not his kinsfolk. He is an orphan. I doubt if he has any relations that he keeps up with. He has no brothers nor sisters. I don't care where he comes from."

"What was his father?" asked Professor Frazer coldly.

"I don't know. Why should I go prying into every particular of his family, and asking who his father was, and what was the maiden name of his mother, and when his grandmother was married?"

"Yet I think I have heard Miss Margaret Frazer speak up pretty strongly in favour of a long line of unspotted ancestry."

"I had forgotten our own, I suppose, when I spoke so. Simon, Lord Lovat, is a creditable great-uncle to the Frazers! If all tales be true, he ought to have been hanged for a felon, instead of beheaded like a loyal gentleman."

"Oh! if you're determined to foul your own nest, I have done. Let James Brown come in; I will make him my bow, and thank him for condescending to marry a Frazer."

"Uncle," said Margaret, now fairly crying, "don't let us part in anger! We love each other in our hearts. You have been good to me, and so has my aunt. But I have given my word to Doctor Brown, and I must keep it. I should love him, if he was the son of a ploughman. We don't expect to be rich; but he has a few hundreds to start with, and I have my own hundred a year"——

"Well, well, child, don't cry! You have settled it all for yourself, it seems; so I wash my hands of it. I shake off all responsibility. You will tell your aunt what arrangements you make with Doctor Brown about your marriage; and I will do what you wish in the matter. But don't send the young man in to me to ask my consent! I neither give

it nor withhold it. It would have been different, if it had been Sir Alexander."

"Oh! Uncle Frazer, don't speak so. See Doctor Brown, and at any rate—for my sake—tell him you consent! Let me belong to you that much! It seems so desolate at such a time to have to dispose of myself, as if nobody owned or cared for me."

The door was thrown open, and Doctor James Brown was announced. Margaret hastened away; and, before he was aware, the Professor had given a sort of consent, without asking a question of the happy young man; who hurried away to seek his betrothed, leaving her uncle muttering to himself.

Both Doctor and Mrs. Frazer were so strongly opposed to Margaret's engagement, in reality, that they could not help showing it by manner and implication; although they had the grace to keep silent. But Margaret felt even more keenly than her lover that he was not welcome in the house. Her pleasure in seeing him was destroyed by her sense of the coldness with which he was received, and she willingly yielded to his desire of a short engagement; which was contrary to their original plan of waiting until he should be settled in practice in London, and should see his way clear to such an income as would render their marriage a prudent step. Doctor and Mrs. Frazer neither objected nor approved. Margaret would rather have had the most vehement opposition than this icy coldness. But it made her turn with redoubled affection to her warm-hearted and sympathising lover. Not that she had ever discussed her uncle and aunt's behaviour with him. As long as he was apparently unaware of it, she would not awaken him to a sense of it. Besides, they had stood to her so long in the relation of parents, that she felt she had no right to bring in a stranger to sit in judgment upon them.

So it was rather with a heavy heart that she arranged their future *ménage* with Doctor Brown, unable to profit by her aunt's experience and wisdom. But Margaret herself

was a prudent and sensible girl. Although accustomed to a degree of comfort in her uncle's house that almost amounted to luxury, she could resolutely dispense with it, when occasion required. When Doctor Brown started for London, to seek and prepare their new home, she enjoined him not to make any but the most necessary preparations for her reception. She would herself superintend all that was wanting when she came. He had some old furniture, stored up in a warehouse, which had been his mother's. He proposed selling it, and buying new in its place. Margaret persuaded him not to do this, but to make it go as far as it could. The household of the newly-married couple was to consist of a Scotchwoman long connected with the Frazer family, who was to be the sole female servant, and of a man whom Doctor Brown picked up in London, soon after he had fixed on a house—a man named Crawford, who had lived for many years with a gentleman now gone abroad, who gave him the most excellent character, in reply to Doctor Brown's inquiries. This gentleman had employed Crawford in a number of ways; so that in fact he was a kind of Jack-of-all-trades; and Doctor Brown, in every letter to Margaret, had some new accomplishment of his servant's to relate. This he did with the more fulness and zest, because Margaret had slightly questioned the wisdom of starting in life with a man-servant, but had yielded to Doctor Brown's arguments on the necessity of keeping up a respectable appearance, making a decent show, &c., to any one who might be inclined to consult him, but be daunted by the appearance of old Christie out of the kitchen, and unwilling to leave a message with one who spoke such unintelligible English. Crawford was so good a carpenter that he could put up shelves, adjust faulty hinges, mend locks, and even went the length of constructing a box of some old boards that had once formed a packing-case. Crawford, one day, when his master was too busy to go out for his dinner, improvised an omelette as good as any Doctor Brown had ever tasted in Paris, when he was studying there. In short, Crawford was a kind of

Admirable Crichton in his way, and Margaret was quite convinced that Doctor Brown was right in his decision that they must have a man-servant; even before she was respectfully greeted by Crawford, as he opened the door to the newly-married couple, when they came to their new home after their short wedding tour.

Doctor Brown was rather afraid lest Margaret should think the house bare and cheerless in its half-furnished state; for he had obeyed her injunctions and bought as little furniture as might be, in addition to the few things he had inherited from his mother. His consulting-room (how grand it sounded!) was completely arranged, ready for stray patients; and it was well calculated to make a good impression on them. There was a Turkey-carpet on the floor, that had been his mother's, and was just sufficiently worn to give it the air of respectability which handsome pieces of furniture have when they look as if they had not just been purchased for the occasion, but are in some degree hereditary. The same appearance pervaded the room: the library-table (bought second-hand, it must be confessed), the bureau—that had been his mother's—the leather chairs (as hereditary as the library-table), the shelves Crawford had put up for Doctor Brown's medical books, a good engraving on the walls, gave altogether so pleasant an aspect to the apartment that both Doctor and Mrs. Brown thought, for that evening at any rate, that poverty was just as comfortable a thing as riches. Crawford had ventured to take the liberty of placing a few flowers about the room, as his humble way of welcoming his mistress—late autumn-flowers, blending the idea of summer with that of winter, suggested by the bright little fire in the grate. Christie sent up delicious scones for tea; and Mrs. Frazer had made up for her want of geniality, as well as she could, by a store of marmalade and mutton hams. Doctor Brown could not be easy in his comfort, until he had shown Margaret, almost with a groan, how many rooms were as yet unfurnished—how much remained to be done. But she laughed at his alarm lest she

should be disappointed in her new home; declared that she should like nothing better than planning and contriving; that, what with her own talent for upholstery and Crawford's for joinery, the rooms would be furnished as if by magic, and no bills—the usual consequences of comfort—be forthcoming. But, with the morning and daylight, Doctor Brown's anxiety returned. He saw and felt every crack in the ceiling, every spot on the paper, not for himself, but for Margaret. He was constantly in his own mind, as it seemed, comparing the home he had brought her to with the one she had left. He seemed constantly afraid lest she had repented, or would repent having married him. This morbid restlessness was the only drawback to their great happiness; and, to do away with it, Margaret was led into expenses much beyond her original intention. She bought this article in preference to that, because her husband, if he went shopping with her, seemed so miserable if he suspected that she denied herself the slightest wish on the score of economy. She learnt to avoid taking him out with her, when she went to make her purchases; as it was a very simple thing to her to choose the least expensive thing, even though it were the ugliest, when she was by herself, but not a simple painless thing to harden her heart to his look of mortification, when she quietly said to the shopman that she could not afford this or that. On coming out of a shop after one of these occasions, he had said—

"Oh, Margaret, I ought not to have married you. You must forgive me—I have so loved you."

"Forgive you, James?" said she. "For making me so happy? What should make you think I care so much for rep in preference to moreen? Don't speak so again, please!"

"Oh, Margaret! but don't forget how I ask you to forgive me."

Crawford was everything that he had promised to be, and more than could be desired. He was Margaret's right hand in all her little household plans, in a way which irritated Christie not a little. This feud between Christie and Crawford

was indeed the greatest discomfort in the household. Crawford was silently triumphant in his superior knowledge of London, in his favour upstairs, in his power of assisting his mistress, and in the consequent privilege of being frequently consulted. Christie was for ever regretting Scotland, and hinting at Margaret's neglect of one who had followed her fortunes into a strange country, to make a favourite of a stranger, and one who was none so good as he ought to be, as she would sometimes affirm. But, as she never brought any proof of her vague accusations, Margaret did not choose to question her, but set them down to a jealousy of her fellow-servant, which the mistress did all in her power to heal. On the whole, however, the four people forming this family lived together in tolerable harmony. Doctor Brown was more than satisfied with his house, his servants, his professional prospects, and most of all with his little energetic wife. Margaret, from time to time, was taken aback by certain moods of her husband's; but the tendency of these moods was not to weaken her affection, rather to call out a feeling of pity for what appeared to her morbid sufferings and suspicions—a pity ready to be turned into sympathy, as soon as she could discover any definite cause for his occasional depression of spirits. Christie did not pretend to like Crawford; but, as Margaret quietly declined to listen to her grumblings and discontent on this head, and as Crawford himself was almost painfully solicitous to gain the good opinion of the old Scotch woman, there was no rupture between them. On the whole, the popular, successful Doctor Brown was apparently the most anxious person in his family. There could be no great cause for this as regarded his money affairs. By one of those lucky accidents which sometimes lift a man up out of his struggles, and carry him on to smooth, unencumbered ground, he made a great step in his professional progress; and their income from this source was likely to be fully as much as Margaret and he had ever anticipated in their most sanguine moments, with the likelihood, too, of steady increase, as the years went on.

I must explain myself more fully on this head.

Margaret herself had rather more than a hundred a year; sometimes, indeed, her dividends had amounted to a hundred and thirty or forty pounds; but on that she dared not rely. Doctor Brown had seventeen hundred remaining of the three thousand left him by his mother; and out of this he had to pay for some of the furniture, the bills for which had not been sent in at the time, in spite of all Margaret's entreaties that such might be the case. They came in about a week before the time when the events I am going to narrate took place. Of course they amounted to more than even the prudent Margaret had expected; and she was a little dispirited to find how much money it would take to liquidate them. But, curiously and contradictorily enough—as she had often noticed before—any real cause for anxiety or disappointment did not seem to affect her husband's cheerfulness. He laughed at her dismay over her accounts, jingled the proceeds of that day's work in his pockets, counted it out to her, and calculated the year's probable income from that day's gains. Margaret took the guineas, and carried them upstairs to her own *secrétaire* in silence; having learnt the difficult art of trying to swallow down her household cares in the presence of her husband. When she came back, she was cheerful, if grave. He had taken up the bills in her absence, and had been adding them together.

"Two hundred and thirty-six pounds," he said, putting the accounts away, to clear the table for tea, as Crawford brought in the things. "Why, I don't call that much. I believe I reckoned on their coming to a great deal more. I'll go into the City to-morrow, and sell out some shares, and set your little heart at ease. Now don't go and put a spoonful less tea in to-night to help to pay these bills. Earning is better than saving, and I am earning at a famous rate. Give me good tea, Maggie, for I have done a good day's work."

They were sitting in the doctor's consulting-room, for the better economy of fire. To add to Margaret's discomfort,

the chimney smoked this evening. She had held her tongue from any repining words; for she remembered the old proverb about a smoky chimney and a scolding wife; but she was more irritated by the puffs of smoke coming over her pretty white work than she cared to show; and it was in a sharper tone than usual that she spoke, in bidding Crawford take care and have the chimney swept. The next morning all had cleared brightly off. Her husband had convinced her that their money matters were going on well; the fire burned briskly at breakfast time; and the unwonted sun shone in at the windows. Margaret was surprised, when Crawford told her that he had not been able to meet with a chimney-sweeper that morning; but that he had tried to arrange the coals in the grate, so that, for this one morning at least, his mistress should not be annoyed, and, by the next, he would take care to secure a sweep. Margaret thanked him, and acquiesced in all plans about giving a general cleaning to the room; the more readily, because she felt that she had spoken sharply the night before. She decided to go and pay all her bills, and make some distant calls on the next morning; and her husband promised to go into the City and provide her with the money.

This he did. He showed her the notes that evening, locked them up for the night in his bureau; and, lo, in the morning they were gone! They had breakfasted in the back parlour, or half-furnished dining-room. A charwoman was in the front room, cleaning after the sweeps. Doctor Brown went to his bureau, singing an old Scotch tune as he left the dining-room. It was so long before he came back, that Margaret went to look for him. He was sitting in the chair nearest to the bureau, leaning his head upon it, in an attitude of the deepest despondency. He did not seem to hear Margaret's step, as she made her way among rolled-up carpets and chairs piled on each other. She had to touch him on the shoulder before she could rouse him.

"James, James!" she said in alarm.

He looked up at her almost as if he did not know her.

"Oh, Margaret!" he said, and took hold of her hands, and hid his face in her neck.

"Dearest love, what is it?" she asked, thinking he was suddenly taken ill.

"Some one has been to my bureau since last night," he groaned, without either looking up or moving.

"And taken the money," said Margaret, in an instant understanding how it stood. It was a great blow; a great loss, far greater than the few extra pounds by which the bills had exceeded her calculations: yet it seemed as if she could bear it better. "Oh dear!" she said, "that is bad; but after all—Do you know," she said, trying to raise his face, so that she might look into it, and give him the encouragement of her honest loving eyes, "at first I thought you were deadly ill, and all sorts of dreadful possibilities rushed through my mind—it is such a relief to find that it is only money"——

"Only money!" he echoed sadly, avoiding her look, as if he could not bear to show her how much he felt it.

"And after all," she said with spirit, "it can't be gone far. Only last night, it was here. The chimney-sweeps—we must send Crawford for the police directly. You did not take the numbers of the notes?" ringing the bell as she spoke.

"No; they were only to be in our possession one night," he said.

"No, to be sure not."

The charwoman now appeared at the door with her pail of hot water. Margaret looked into her face, as if to read guilt or innocence. She was a *protégée* of Christie's, who was not apt to accord her favour easily, or without good grounds; an honest, decent widow, with a large family to maintain by her labour—that was the character in which Margaret had engaged her; and she looked it. Grimy in her dress—because she could not spare the money or time to be clean—her skin looked healthy and cared for; she had a straightforward, business-like appearance about her, and seemed in no ways daunted nor surprised to see Doctor and

Mrs. Brown standing in the middle of the room, in displeased perplexity and distress. She went about her business without taking any particular notice of them. Margaret's suspicions settled down yet more distinctly upon the chimney-sweeper; but he could not have gone far; the notes could hardly have got into circulation. Such a sum could not have been spent by such a man in so short a time; and the restoration of the money was her first, her only object. She had scarcely a thought for subsequent duties, such as prosecution of the offender, and the like consequences of crime. While her whole energies were bent on the speedy recovery of the money, and she was rapidly going over the necessary steps to be taken, her husband "sat all poured out into his chair," as the Germans say; no force in him to keep his limbs in any attitude requiring the slightest exertion; his face sunk, miserable, and with that foreshadowing of the lines of age which sudden distress is apt to call out on the youngest and smoothest faces.

"What can Crawford be about?" said Margaret, pulling the bell again with vehemence. "Oh, Crawford!" as the man at that instant appeared at the door.

"Is anything the matter?" he said, interrupting her, as if alarmed into an unusual discomposure by her violent ringing. "I had just gone round the corner with the letter master gave me last night for the post; and, when I came back Christie told me you had rung for me, ma'am. I beg your pardon, but I have hurried so," and, indeed, his breath did come quickly, and his face was full of penitent anxiety.

"Oh, Crawford! I am afraid the sweep has got into your master's bureau, and taken all the money he put there last night. It is gone, at any rate. Did you ever leave him in the room alone?"

"I can't say, ma'am; perhaps I did. Yes; I believe I did. I remember now—I had my work to do; and I thought the charwoman was come, and I went to my pantry; and some time after Christie came to me, complaining that Mrs. Roberts was so late; and then I knew that he must have

been alone in the room. But, dear me, ma'am, who would have thought there had been so much wickedness in him?"

"How was it that he got into the bureau?" said Margaret, turning to her husband. "Was the lock broken?"

He roused himself up, like one who wakens from sleep.

"Yes! No! I suppose I had turned the key without locking it last night. The bureau was closed, not locked, when I went to it this morning, and the bolt was shot." He relapsed into inactive, thoughtful silence.

"At any rate, it is no use losing time in wondering now. Go, Crawford, as fast as you can, for a policeman. You know the name of the chimney-sweeper, of course," she added, as Crawford was preparing to leave the room.

"Indeed, ma'am, I'm very sorry, but I just agreed with the first who was passing along the street. If I could have known"——

But Margaret had turned away with an impatient gesture of despair. Crawford went, without another word, to seek a policeman.

In vain did his wife try and persuade Doctor Brown to taste any breakfast; a cup of tea was all he would try to swallow; and that was taken in hasty gulps, to clear his dry throat, as he heard Crawford's voice talking to the policeman whom he was ushering in.

The policeman heard all and said little. Then the inspector came. Doctor Brown seemed to leave all the talking to Crawford, who apparently liked nothing better. Margaret was infinitely distressed and dismayed by the effect the robbery seemed to have had on her husband's energies. The probable loss of such a sum was bad enough; but there was something so weak and poor in character in letting it affect him so strongly as to deaden all energy and destroy all hopeful spring, that, although Margaret did not dare to define her feeling, nor the cause of it, to herself, she had the fact before her perpetually, that, if she were to judge of her husband from this morning only, she must learn to rely on herself alone in all cases of emergency. The inspector

repeatedly turned from Crawford to Doctor and Mrs. Brown for answers to his inquiries. It was Margaret who replied, with terse, short sentences, very different from Crawford's long, involved explanations.

At length the inspector asked to speak to her alone. She followed him into the room, past the affronted Crawford and her despondent husband. The inspector gave one sharp look at the charwoman, who was going on with her scouring with stolid indifference, turned her out, and then asked Margaret where Crawford came from—how long he had lived with them, and various other questions, all showing the direction his suspicions had taken. This shocked Margaret extremely; but she quickly answered every inquiry, and, at the end, watched the inspector's face closely, and waited for the avowal of the suspicion.

He led the way back to the other room without a word, however. Crawford had left, and Doctor Brown was trying to read the morning's letters (which had just been delivered); but his hands shook so much that he could not see a line.

"Doctor Brown," said the inspector, "I have little doubt that your man-servant has committed this robbery. I judge so from his whole manner; and from his anxiety to tell the story, and his way of trying to throw suspicion on the chimney-sweeper, neither whose name nor whose dwelling he can give; at least he says not. Your wife tells us he has already been out of the house this morning, even before he went to summon a policeman; so there is little doubt that he has found means for concealing or disposing of the notes; and you say you do not know the numbers. However, that can probably be ascertained."

At this moment Christie knocked at the door, and, in a state of great agitation, demanded to speak to Margaret. She brought up an additional store of suspicious circumstances, none of them much in themselves, but all tending to criminate her fellow-servant. She had expected to find herself blamed for starting the idea of Crawford's guilt, and was rather surprised to find herself listened to with attention

by the inspector. This led her to tell many other little things, all bearing against Crawford, which a dread of being thought jealous and quarrelsome had led her to conceal before from her master and mistress. At the end of her story the inspector said—

"There can be no doubt of the course to be taken. You, sir, must give your man-servant in charge. He will be taken before the sitting magistrate directly; and there is already evidence enough to make him be remanded for a week, during which time we may trace the notes, and complete the chain."

"Must I prosecute?" said Doctor Brown, almost lividly pale. "It is, I own, a serious loss of money to me; but there will be the further expenses of the prosecution—the loss of time—the"——

He stopped. He saw his wife's indignant eyes fixed upon him, and shrank from their look of unconscious reproach.

"Yes, inspector," he said; "I give him in charge. Do what you will. Do what is right. Of course I take the consequences. We take the consequences. Don't we, Margaret?" He spoke in a kind of wild, low voice, of which Margaret thought it best to take no notice.

"Tell us exactly what to do," she said very coldly and quietly, addressing herself to the policeman.

He gave her the necessary directions as to their attending at the police-office, and bringing Christie as a witness, and then went away to take measures for securing Crawford.

Margaret was surprised to find how little hurry or violence needed to be used in Crawford's arrest. She had expected to hear sounds of commotion in the house, if indeed Crawford himself had not taken the alarm and escaped. But, when she had suggested the latter apprehension to the inspector, he smiled, and told her that, when he had first heard of the charge from the policeman on the beat, he had stationed a detective officer within sight of the house, to watch all ingress or egress; so that Crawford's whereabouts

would soon have been discovered, if he had attempted to escape.

Margaret's attention was now directed to her husband. He was making hurried preparations for setting off on his round of visits, and evidently did not wish to have any conversation with her on the subject of the morning's event. He promised to be back by eleven o'clock; before which time, the inspector assured them, their presence would not be needed. Once or twice, Doctor Brown said, as if to himself, "It is a miserable business." Indeed, Margaret felt it to be so; and, now that the necessity for immediate speech and action was over, she began to fancy that she must be very hard-hearted—very deficient in common feeling; inasmuch as she had not suffered like her husband, at the discovery that the servant—whom they had been learning to consider as a friend, and to look upon as having their interests so warmly at heart—was, in all probability, a treacherous thief. She remembered all his pretty marks of attention to her, from the day when he had welcomed her arrival at her new home by his humble present of flowers, until only the day before, when, seeing her fatigued, he had, unasked, made her a cup of coffee—coffee such as none but he could make. How often had he thought of warm dry clothes for her husband; how wakeful had he been at nights; how diligent in the mornings! It was no wonder that her husband felt this discovery of domestic treason acutely. It was she who was hard and selfish, thinking more of the recovery of the money than of the terrible disappointment in character, if the charge against Crawford were true.

At eleven o'clock her husband returned with a cab. Christie had thought the occasion of appearing at a police-office worthy of her Sunday clothes, and was as smart as her possessions could make her. But Margaret and her husband looked as pale and sorrow-stricken as if they had been the accused, and not the accusers.

Doctor Brown shrank from meeting Crawford's eye, as the one took his place in the witness-box, the other in the

dock. Yet Crawford was trying—Margaret was sure of this—to catch his master's attention. Failing that, he looked at Margaret with an expression she could not fathom. Indeed, the whole character of his face was changed. Instead of the calm, smooth look of attentive obedience, he had assumed an insolent, threatening expression of defiance; smiling occasionally in a most unpleasant manner, as Doctor Brown spoke of the bureau and its contents. He was remanded for a week; but, the evidence as yet being far from conclusive, bail for his appearance was taken. This bail was offered by his brother, a respectable tradesman, well known in his neighbourhood, and to whom Crawford had sent on his arrest.

So Crawford was at large again, much to Christie's dismay; who took off her Sunday clothes, on her return home, with a heavy heart, hoping, rather than trusting, that they should not all be murdered in their beds before the week was out. It must be confessed, Margaret herself was not entirely free from fears of Crawford's vengeance; his eyes had looked so maliciously and vindictively at her and at her husband as they gave their evidence.

But his absence in the household gave Margaret enough to do to prevent her dwelling on foolish fears. His being away made a terrible blank in their daily comfort, which neither Margaret nor Christie—exert themselves as they would—could fill up; and it was the more necessary that all should go on smoothly, as Doctor Brown's nerves had received such a shock at the discovery of the guilt of his favourite, trusted servant, that Margaret was led at times to apprehend a serious illness. He would pace about the room at night, when he thought she was asleep, moaning to himself—and in the morning he would require the utmost persuasion to induce him to go out and see his patients. He was worse than ever, after consulting the lawyer whom he had employed to conduct the prosecution. There was, as Margaret was brought unwillingly to perceive, some mystery in the case; for he eagerly took his letters from the post, going to the

door as soon as he heard the knock, and concealing their directions from her. As the week passed away, his nervous misery still increased.

One evening—the candles were not lighted—he was sitting over the fire in a listless attitude, resting his head on his hand, and that supported on his knee—Margaret determined to try an experiment; to see if she could not probe, and find out the nature of, the sore that he hid with such constant care. She took a stool and sat down at his feet, taking his hand in hers.

"Listen, dearest James, to an old story I once heard. It may interest you. There were two orphans, boy and girl in their hearts, though they were a young man and young woman in years. They were not brother and sister, and by-and-by they fell in love; just in the same fond silly way you and I did, you remember. Well, the girl was amongst her own people; but the boy was far away from his—if indeed he had any alive. But the girl loved him so dearly for himself, that sometimes she thought she was glad that he had no one to care for him but just her alone. Her friends did not like him as much as she did; for, perhaps, they were wise, grave, cold people, and she, I dare say, was very foolish. And they did not like her marrying the boy; which was just stupidity in them, for they had not a word to say against him. But, about a week before the marriage-day was fixed, they thought they had found out something—my darling love, don't take away your hand—don't tremble so, only just listen! Her aunt came to her and said: 'Child, you must give up your lover: his father was tempted, and sinned; and, if he is now alive, he is a transported convict. The marriage cannot take place.' But the girl stood up and said: 'If he has known this great sorrow and shame, he needs my love all the more. I will not leave him, nor forsake him, but love him all the better. And I charge you, aunt, as you hope to receive a blessing for doing as you would be done by, that you tell no one!' I really think that girl awed her aunt, in some strange way, into secrecy.

But, when she was left alone, she cried long and sadly to think what a shadow rested on the heart she loved so dearly; and she meant to strive to lighten his life, and to conceal for ever that she had heard of its burden; but now she thinks—Oh, my husband! how you must have suffered"—as he bent down his head on her shoulder and cried terrible man's tears.

"God be thanked!" he said at length. "You know all, and you do not shrink from me. Oh, what a miserable, deceitful coward I have been! Suffered! Yes—suffered enough to drive me mad; and, if I had but been brave, I might have been spared all this long twelve months of agony. But it is right I should have been punished. And you knew it even before we were married, when you might have been drawn back!"

"I could not; you would not have broken off your engagement with me, would you, under the like circumstances, if our cases had been reversed?"

"I do not know. Perhaps I might; for I am not so brave, so good, so strong as you, my Margaret. How could I be? Let me tell you more. We wandered about, my mother and I, thankful that our name was such a common one, but shrinking from every allusion—in a way which no one can understand, who has not been conscious of an inward sore. Living in an assize town was torture; a commercial one was nearly as bad. My father was the son of a dignified clergyman, well known to his brethren: a cathedral town was to be avoided, because there the circumstance of the Dean of Saint Botolph's son having been transported was sure to be known. I had to be educated; therefore we had to live in a town; for my mother could not bear to part from me, and I was sent to a day-school. We were very poor for our station—no! we had no station; we were the wife and child of a convict—poor for my mother's early habits, I should have said. But, when I was about fourteen, my father died in his exile, leaving, as convicts in those days sometimes did, a large fortune. It all came to us. My

mother shut herself up, and cried and prayed for a whole day. Then she called me in, and took me into her counsel. We solemnly pledged ourselves to give the money to some charity, as soon as I was legally of age. Till then the interest was laid by, every penny of it; though sometimes we were in sore distress for money, my education cost so much. But how could we tell in what way the money had been accumulated?" Here he dropped his voice. "Soon after I was one-and-twenty, the papers rang with admiration of the unknown munificent donor of certain sums. I loathed their praises. I shrank from all recollection of my father. I remembered him dimly, but always as angry and violent with my mother. My poor, gentle mother! Margaret, she loved my father; and, for her sake, I have tried, since her death, to feel kindly towards his memory. Soon after my mother's death, I came to know you, my jewel, my treasure!"

After a while, he began again. "But, oh, Margaret! even now you do not know the worst. After my mother's death, I found a bundle of law papers—of newspaper reports about my father's trial. Poor soul! why she had kept them, I cannot say. They were covered over with notes in her handwriting; and, for that reason, I kept them. It was so touching to read her record of the days spent by her in her solitary innocence, while he was embroiling himself deeper and deeper in crime. I kept this bundle (as I thought so safely!) in a secret drawer of my bureau; but that wretch Crawford has got hold of it. I missed the papers that very morning. The loss of them was infinitely worse than the loss of the money; and now Crawford threatens to bring out the one terrible fact, in open court, if he can; and his lawyer may do it, I believe. At any rate, to have it blazoned out to the world—I who have spent my life in fearing this hour! But most of all for you, Margaret! Still—if only it could be avoided! Who will employ the son of Brown, the noted forger? I shall lose all my practice. Men will look askance at me as I enter their doors. They will drive me

into crime. I sometimes fear that crime is hereditary! Oh, Margaret! what am I to do?"

"What can you do?" she asked.

"I can refuse to prosecute."

"Let Crawford go free, you knowing him to be guilty?"

"I know him to be guilty."

"Then, simply, you cannot do this thing. You let loose a criminal upon the public."

"But, if I do not, we shall come to shame and poverty. It is for you I mind it, not for myself. I ought never to have married."

"Listen to me. I don't care for poverty; and, as to shame, I should feel it twenty times more grievously, if you and I consented to screen the guilty, from any fear or for any selfish motives of our own. I don't pretend that I shall not feel it, when first the truth is known. But my shame will turn into pride, as I watch you live it down. You have been rendered morbid, dear husband, by having something all your life to conceal. Let the world know the truth, and say the worst. You will go forth a free, honest, honourable man, able to do your future work without fear."

"That scoundrel Crawford has sent for an answer to his impudent note," said Christie, putting in her head at the door.

"Stay! May *I* write it?" said Margaret.

She wrote:—

"Whatever you may do or say, there is but one course open to us. No threats can deter your master from doing his duty.

"Margaret Brown."

"There!" she said, passing it to her husband; "he will see that I know all; and I suspect he has reckoned something on your tenderness for me."

Margaret's note only enraged, it did not daunt, Crawford. Before a week was out, every one who cared knew that Doctor Brown, the rising young physician, was son of the

notorious Brown, the forger. All the consequences took place which he had anticipated. Crawford had to suffer a severe sentence; and Doctor Brown and his wife had to leave their house and go to a smaller one; they had to pinch and to screw, aided in all most zealously by the faithful Christie. But Doctor Brown was lighter-hearted than he had ever been before in his conscious lifetime. His foot was now firmly planted on the ground, and every step he rose was a sure gain. People did say that Margaret had been seen, in those worst times, on her hands and knees cleaning her own door-step. But I don't believe it, for Christie would never have let her do that. And, as far as my own evidence goes, I can only say that, the last time I was in London, I saw a brass-plate, with "Doctor James Brown" upon it, on the door of a handsome house in a handsome square. And as I looked, I saw a brougham drive up to the door, and a lady get out, and go into that house, who was certainly the Margaret Frazer of old days—graver; more portly; more stern, I had almost said. But, as I watched and thought, I saw her come to the dining-room window with a baby in her arms, and her whole face melted into a smile of infinite sweetness.

THE GREY WOMAN

PORTION I

There is a mill by the Neckar-side, to which many people resort for coffee, according to the fashion which is almost national in Germany. There is nothing particularly attractive in the situation of this mill; it is on the Mannheim (the flat and unromantic) side of Heidelberg. The river turns the mill-wheel with a plenteous gushing sound; the out-buildings and the dwelling-house of the miller form a well-kept dusty quadrangle. Again, further from the river there is a garden full of willows, and arbours, and flower-beds not well kept, but very profuse in flowers and luxuriant creepers, knotting and looping the arbours together. In each of these arbours is a stationary table of white painted wood, and light movable chairs of the same colour and material.

I went to drink coffee there with some friends in 184—. The stately old miller came out to greet us, as some of the party were known to him of old. He was of a grand build of a man; and his loud musical voice, with its tone friendly and familiar, his rolling laugh of welcome, went well with the keen bright eye, the fine cloth of his coat, and the general look of substance about the place. Poultry of all kinds abounded in the mill-yard, where there were ample means of livelihood for them strewed on the ground; but, not content with this, the miller took out handfuls of corn from the sacks, and threw liberally to the cocks and hens that ran almost under his feet in their eagerness. And, all the time he was doing this, as it were habitually, he was talking to us, and

ever and anon calling to his daughter and the serving-maids, to bid them hasten the coffee we had ordered. He followed us to an arbour, and saw us served to his satisfaction with the best of everything we could ask for; and then left us to go round to the different arbours and see that each party was properly attended to; and, as he went, this great, prosperous, happy-looking man whistled softly one of the most plaintive airs I ever heard.

"His family," said one of my friends, "have held this mill ever since the old Palatinate days; or rather, I should say, have possessed the ground ever since then, for two successive mills of theirs have been burnt down by the French. If you want to see Scherer in a passion, just talk to him of the possibility of a French invasion."

But at this moment, still whistling that mournful air, we saw the miller going down the steps that led from the somewhat raised garden into the mill-yard; and so I seemed to have lost my chance of putting him in a passion.

We had nearly finished our coffee, and our *kuchen*, and our cinnamon cake, when heavy splashes fell on our thick leafy covering; quicker and quicker they came, coming through the tender leaves, as if they were tearing them asunder; all the people in the garden were hurrying under shelter, or seeking for their carriages standing outside. Up the steps the miller came hastening, with a crimson umbrella, fit to cover every one left in the garden, and followed by his daughter, and one or two maidens, each bearing an umbrella.

"Come into the house—come in, I say! It is a summer-storm, and will flood the place for an hour or two, till the river carries it away. Here, here!"

And we followed him back into his own house. We went into the kitchen first. Such an array of bright copper and tin vessels I never saw; and all the wooden things were as thoroughly scoured. The red-tiled floor was spotless when we went in, but in two minutes it was all over slop and dirt with the tread of many feet; for the kitchen was filled, and still the worthy miller kept bringing in more people under

his great crimson umbrella. He even called the dogs in, and made them lie down under the tables.

His daughter said something to him in German, and he shook his head merrily at her. Everybody laughed.

"What did she say?" I asked.

"She told him to bring the ducks in next; but, indeed, if more people come we shall be suffocated. What with the thundery weather, and the stove, and all these steaming clothes, I really think we must ask leave to pass on. Perhaps we might go in and see Frau Scherer?"

My friend asked the daughter of the house for permission to go into an inner chamber and see her mother. It was granted; and we went into a sort of saloon, overlooking the Neckar; very small, very bright, and very close. The floor was slippery with polish; long narrow pieces of looking-glass against the walls reflected the perpetual motion of the river opposite; a white porcelain stove, with some old-fashioned ornaments of brass about it; a sofa, covered with Utrecht velvet, a table before it, and a piece of worsted-worked carpet under it; a vase of artificial flowers; and, lastly, an alcove with a bed in it, on which lay the paralysed wife of the good miller, knitting busily, formed the furniture. I spoke as if this was all that was to be seen in the room; but, sitting quietly, while my friend kept up a brisk conversation in a language which I but half understood, my eye was caught by a picture in a dark corner of the room, and I got up to examine it more nearly.

It was that of a young girl of extreme beauty: evidently of middle rank. There was a sensitive refinement in her face, as if she almost shrank from the gaze which, of necessity, the painter must have fixed upon her. It was not over-well painted; but I felt that it must have been a good likeness, from this strong impress of peculiar character which I have tried to describe. From the dress, I should guess it to have been painted in the latter half of the last century. And I afterwards heard that I was right.

There was a little pause in the conversation.

"Will you ask Frau Scherer who this is?"

My friend repeated my question, and received a long reply in German. Then she turned round and translated it to me.

"It is the likeness of a great-aunt of her husband's." (My friend was standing by me, looking at the picture with sympathetic curiosity.) "See! here is the name on the open page of this Bible, 'Anna Scherer, 1778.' Frau Scherer says there is a tradition in the family that this pretty girl, with her complexion of lilies and roses, lost her colour so entirely through fright, that she was known by the name of the Grey Woman. She speaks as if this Anna Scherer lived in some state of lifelong terror. But she does not know details; refers me to her husband for them. She thinks he has some papers which were written by the original of that picture for her daughter, who died in this very house not long after our friend there was married. We can ask Herr Scherer for the whole story if you like."

"Oh yes, pray do!" said I. And, as our host came in at this moment to ask how we were faring, and to tell us that he had sent to Heidelberg for carriages to convey us home, seeing no chance of the heavy rain abating, my friend, after thanking him, passed on to my request.

"Ah!" said he, his face changing, "the aunt Anna had a sad history. It was all owing to one of those hellish Frenchmen; and her daughter suffered for it—the cousin Ursula, as we all called her when I was a child. To be sure, the good cousin Ursula was his child as well. The sins of the fathers are visited on their children. The lady would like to know all about it, would she? Well, there are papers—a kind of apology the aunt Anna wrote for putting an end to her daughter's engagement—or rather, facts which she revealed, that prevented cousin Ursula from marrying the man she loved; and so she would never have any other good fellow; else, I have heard say, my father would have been thankful to have made her his wife." All this time, he was rummaging in the drawer of an old-fashioned bureau;

and now he turned round, with a bundle of yellow MSS. in his hand, which he gave to my friend, saying, "Take it home, take it home; and, if you care to make out our crabbed German writing, you may keep it as long as you like, and read it at your leisure. Only, I must have it back again, when you have done with it, that's all."

And so we became possessed of the manuscript of the following letter, which it was our employment, during many a long evening that ensuing winter, to translate, and in some parts to abbreviate. The letter began with some reference to the pain which she had already inflicted upon her daughter by some unexplained opposition to a project of marriage; but I doubt if, without the clue with which the good miller had furnished us, we could have made out even this much from the passionate, broken sentences that made us fancy that some scene between the mother and daughter—and possibly a third person—had occurred, just before the mother had begun to write.

"Thou dost not love thy child, mother! Thou dost not care, if her heart is broken!" Ah, God! and these words of my heart-beloved Ursula ring in my ears, as if the sound of them would fill them when I lie a-dying. And her poor tear-stained face comes between me and everything else. Child! hearts do not break; life is very tough, as well as very terrible. But I will not decide for thee. I will tell all; and thou shalt bear the burden of choice. I may be wrong; I have little wit left, and never had much, I think; but an instinct serves me in place of judgment, and that instinct tells me that thou and thy Henri must never be married. Yet I may be in error. I would fain make my child happy. Lay this paper before the good priest Schriesheim, if, after reading it, thou hast doubts which make thee uncertain. Only I will tell thee all now, on condition that no spoken word ever passes between us on the subject. It would kill me to be questioned. I should have to see all present again.

My father held, as thou knowest, the mill on the Neckar,

where thy new-found uncle, Scherer, now lives. Thou rememberest the surprise with which we were received there, last vintage twelvemonth. How thy uncle disbelieved me, when I said that I was his sister Anna, whom he had long believed to be dead; and how I had to lead thee underneath the picture, painted of me long ago, and point out, feature by feature, the likeness between it and thee; and how, as I spoke, I recalled first to my own mind, and then by speech to his, the details of the time when it was painted; the merry words that passed between us, then a happy boy and girl; the position of the articles of furniture in the room; our father's habits; the cherry-tree, now cut down, that shaded the window of my bed-room, through which my brother was wont to squeeze himself, in order to spring on to the topmost bough that would bear his weight; and thence he would pass me back his cap, laden with fruit, to where I sat on the window-sill, too sick with fright for him to care much for eating the cherries.

And at length Fritz gave way, and believed me to be his sister Anna, even as though I were risen from the dead. And thou rememberest how he fetched in his wife, and told her that I was not dead, but was come back to the old home once more, changed as I was. And she would scarce believe him, and scanned me with a cold, distrustful eye; till at length—for I knew her of old as Babette Müller—I said that I was well-to-do, and needed not to seek out friends for what they had to give. And then she asked—not me, but her husband—why I had kept silent so long, leading all—father, brother, every one that loved me in my own dear home—to esteem me dead. And then thine uncle (thou rememberest?) said, he cared not to know more than I cared to tell; that I was his Anna, found again, to be a blessing to him in his old age, as I had been in his boyhood. I thanked him in my heart for his trust; for, were the need for telling all less than it seems to me now, I could not speak of my past life. But she, who was my sister-in-law still, held back her welcome, and, for want of that, I did not go to live in

Heidelberg as I had planned beforehand, in order to be near my brother Fritz, but contented myself with his promise to be a father to my Ursula when I should die and leave this weary world.

That Babette Müller was, as I may say, the cause of all my life's suffering. She was a baker's daughter in Heidelberg—a great beauty, as people said, and, indeed, as I could see for myself. I, too—thou sawest my picture—was reckoned a beauty, and I believe I was so. Babette Müller looked upon me as a rival. She liked to be admired, and had no one much to love her. I had several people to love me—thy grandfather, Fritz, the old servant Käthchen, Karl, the head apprentice at the mill—and I feared admiration and notice, and the being stared at as the "Schöne Müllerin," whenever I went to make my purchases in Heidelberg.

Those were happy, peaceful days. I had Käthchen to help me in the housework; and whatever we did pleased my brave old father, who was always gentle and indulgent towards us women, though he was stern enough with the apprentices in the mill. Karl, the oldest of these, was his favourite; and I can see now that my father wished him to marry me, and that Karl himself was desirous to do so. But Karl was rough-spoken, and passionate—not with me, but with the others—and I shrank from him in a way which, I fear, gave him pain. And then came thy uncle Fritz's marriage; and Babette was brought to the mill, to be its mistress. Not that I cared much for giving up my post; for, in spite of my father's great kindness, I always feared that I did not manage well for so large a family (with the men, and a girl under Käthchen, we sat down eleven each night to supper). But when Babette began to find fault with Käthchen, I was unhappy at the blame that fell on faithful servants; and, by-and-by, I began to see that Babette was egging on Karl to make more open love to me, and, as she once said, to get done with it, and take me off to a home of my own. My father was growing old, and did not perceive all my daily discomfort. The more Karl advanced, the more I disliked

him. He was good in the main; but I had no notion of being married, and could not bear any one who talked to me about it.

Things were in this way when I had an invitation to go to Carlsruhe to visit a schoolfellow, of whom I had been very fond. Babette was all for my going; I don't think I wanted to leave home, and yet I had been very fond of Sophie Rupprecht. But I was always shy among strangers. Somehow, the affair was settled for me, but not until both Fritz and my father had made inquiries as to the character and position of the Rupprechts. They learned that the father had held some kind of inferior position about the Grand-duke's court, and was now dead, leaving a widow, a noble lady, and two daughters, the elder of whom was Sophie, my friend. Madame Rupprecht was not rich, but more than respectable—genteel. When this was ascertained, my father made no opposition to my going; Babette forwarded it by all the means in her power; and even my dear Fritz had his word to say in its favour. Only Käthchen was against it—Käthchen and Karl. The opposition of Karl did more to send me to Carlsruhe than anything. For I could have objected to go; but, when he took upon himself to ask what was the good of going a-gadding, visiting strangers of whom no one knew anything, I yielded to circumstances—to the pulling of Sophie and the pushing of Babette. I was silently vexed, I remember, at Babette's inspection of my clothes; at the way in which she settled that this gown was too old-fashioned, or that too common, to go with me on my visit to a noble lady; and at the way in which she took upon herself to spend the money my father had given me to buy what was requisite for the occasion. And yet I blamed myself, for every one else had thought her so kind for doing all this; and she herself meant kindly, too.

At last I quitted the mill by the Neckar-side. It was a long day's journey, and Fritz went with me to Carlsruhe. The Rupprechts lived on the third floor of a house a little behind one of the principal streets, in a cramped-up court,

to which we gained admittance through a doorway in the street. I remember how pinched their rooms looked after the large space we had at the mill; and yet they had an air of grandeur about them which was new to me, and which gave me pleasure, faded as some of it was. Madame Rupprecht was too formal a lady for me; I was never at my ease with her; but Sophie was all that I had recollected her at school—kind, affectionate, and only rather too ready with her expressions of admiration and regard. The little sister kept out of our way; and that was all we needed, in the first enthusiastic renewal of our early friendship. The one great object of Madame Rupprecht's life was to retain her position in society; and, as her means were much diminished since her husband's death, there was not much comfort, though there was a great deal of show, in their way of living; just the opposite of what it was at my father's house. I believe that my coming was not too much desired by Madame Rupprecht, as I brought with me another mouth to be fed; but Sophie had spent a year or more in entreating for permission to invite me, and her mother, having once consented, was too well-bred not to give me a stately welcome.

The life in Carlsruhe was very different from what it was at home. The hours were later, the coffee was weaker in the morning, the pottage was weaker, the boiled-beef less relieved by other diet; the dresses finer, the evening engagements constant. I did not find these visits pleasant. We might not knit, which would have relieved the tedium a little; but we sat in a circle, talking together, only interrupted occasionally by a gentleman, who, breaking out of the knot of men who stood near the door, talking eagerly together, stole across the room on tiptoe, his hat under his arm, and, bringing his feet together in the position we call the first at the dancing-school, made a low bow to the lady he was going to address. The first time I saw these manners I could not help smiling; but Madame Rupprecht saw me, and spoke to me next morning rather severely, telling me that, of course, in my country breeding I could have seen

nothing of court manners, or French fashions, but that that was no reason for my laughing at them. Of course I tried never to smile again in company. This visit to Carlsruhe took place in '89, just when every one was full of the events taking place at Paris; and yet at Carlsruhe French fashions were more talked of than French politics. Madame Rupprecht, especially, thought a great deal of all French people. And this again was quite different to us at home. Fritz could hardly bear the name of a Frenchman; and it had nearly been an obstacle to my visit to Sophie that her mother preferred being called Madame to her proper title of Frau.

One night I was sitting next to Sophie, and longing for the time when we might have supper and go home, so as to be able to speak together—a thing forbidden by Madame Rupprecht's rules of etiquette, which strictly prohibited any but the most necessary conversation passing between members of the same family when in society. I was sitting, I say, scarcely keeping back my inclination to yawn, when two gentlemen came in, one of whom was evidently a stranger to the whole party, from the formal manner in which the host led him up, and presented him to the hostess. I thought I had never seen any one so handsome or so elegant. His hair was powdered, of course; but one could see from his complexion that it was fair in its natural state. His features were as delicate as a girl's, and set off by two little "mouches," as we called patches in those days; one at the left corner of his mouth, the other prolonging, as it were, the right eye. His dress was blue and silver. I was so lost in admiration of this beautiful young man, that I was as much surprised as if the angel Gabriel had spoken to me, when the lady of the house brought him forward to present him to me. She called him Monsieur de la Tourelle, and he began to speak to me in French; but, though I understood him perfectly, I dared not trust myself to reply to him in that language. Then he tried German, speaking it with a kind of soft lisp that I

thought charming. But, before the end of the evening, I became a little tired of the affected softness and effeminacy of his manners, and the exaggerated compliments he paid me, which had the effect of making all the company turn round and look at me. Madame Rupprecht was, however, pleased with the precise thing that displeased me. She liked either Sophie or me to create a sensation; of course she would have preferred that it should have been her daughter, but her daughter's friend was next best. As we went away, I heard Madame Rupprecht and Monsieur de la Tourelle reciprocating civil speeches with might and main, from which I found out that the French gentleman was coming to call on us the next day. I do not know whether I was more glad or frightened, for I had been kept upon stilts of good manners all the evening. But still I was flattered when Madame Rupprecht spoke as if she had invited him because he had shown pleasure in my society, and even more gratified by Sophie's ungrudging delight at the evident interest I had excited in so fine and agreeable a gentleman. Yet, with all this, they had hard work to keep me from running out of the salon the next day, when we heard his voice inquiring at the gate on the stairs for Madame Rupprecht. They had made me put on my Sunday gown, and they themselves were dressed as for a reception.

When he had gone away, Madame Rupprecht congratulated me on the conquest I had made; for, indeed, he had scarcely spoken to any one else, beyond what mere civility required, and had almost invited himself to come in the evening to bring some new song, which was all the fashion in Paris, he said. Madame Rupprecht had been out all the morning, as she told me, to glean information about Monsieur de la Tourelle. He was a *propriétaire*, and had a small château on the Vosges mountains; he owned land there, but had a large income from some sources quite independent of this property. Altogether, he was a good match, as she emphatically observed. She never seemed to think that I could refuse him after this account of his wealth; nor do I believe

she would have allowed Sophie a choice, even had he been as old and ugly as he was young and handsome. I do not quite know—so many events have come to pass since then, and blurred the clearness of my recollections—if I loved him or not. He was very much devoted to me; he almost frightened me by the excess of his demonstrations of love. And he was very charming to everybody around me, who all spoke of him as the most fascinating of men, and of me as the most fortunate of girls. And yet I never felt quite at my ease with him. I was always relieved when his visits were over, although I missed his presence when he did not come. He prolonged his visit to the friend with whom he was staying at Carlsruhe, on purpose to woo me. He loaded me with presents, which I was unwilling to take; only, Madame Rupprecht seemed to consider me an affected prude if I refused them. Many of these presents consisted of articles of valuable old jewellery, evidently belonging to his family: by accepting these I doubled the ties which were formed around me by circumstances even more than by my own consent. In those days we did not write letters to absent friends as frequently as is done now, and I had been unwilling to name him in the few letters that I wrote home. At length, however, I learned from Madame Rupprecht that she had written to my father to announce the splendid conquest I had made, and to request his presence at my betrothal. I started with astonishment. I had not realised that affairs had gone so far as this. But when she asked me, in a stern, offended manner, what I had meant by my conduct, if I did not intend to marry Monsieur de la Tourelle —I had received his visits, his presents, all his various advances without showing any unwillingness or repugnance —(and it was all true; I had shown no repugnance, though I did not wish to be married to him; at least, not so soon)— what could I do but hang my head, and silently consent to the rapid announcement of the only course which now remained for me, if I would not be esteemed a heartless coquette all the rest of my days?

There was some difficulty, which I afterwards learnt that my sister-in-law had obviated, about my betrothal taking place from home. My father, and Fritz especially, were for having me return to the mill, and there be betrothed, and thence be married. But the Rupprechts and Monsieur de la Tourelle were equally urgent on the other side; and Babette was unwilling to have the trouble of the commotion at the mill, and also, I think, a little disliked the idea of the contrast of my grander marriage with her own.

So my father and Fritz came over to the betrothal. They were to stay at an inn in Carlsruhe for a fortnight, at the end of which time the marriage was to take place. Monsieur de la Tourelle told me he had business at home, which would oblige him to be absent during the interval between the two events; and I was very glad of it, for I did not think that he valued my father and my brother as I could have wished him to do. He was very polite to them; put on all the soft, grand manner, which he had rather dropped with me; and complimented us all round, beginning with my father and Madame Rupprecht, and ending with little Alwina. But he a little scoffed at the old-fashioned church-ceremonies which my father insisted on; and I fancy Fritz must have taken some of his compliments as satire, for I saw certain signs of manner by which I knew that my future husband, for all his civil words, had irritated and annoyed my brother. But all the money arrangements were liberal in the extreme, and more than satisfied, almost surprised, my father. Even Fritz lifted up his eyebrows and whistled. I alone did not care about anything. I was bewitched—in a dream—a kind of despair. I had got into a net through my own timidity and weakness, and I did not see how to get out of it. I clung to my own home-people that fortnight, as I had never done before. Their voices, their ways, were all so pleasant and familiar to me, after the constraint in which I had been living. I might speak and do as I liked without being corrected by Madame Rupprecht, or reproved in a delicate, complimentary way by Monsieur de la Tourelle.

One day, I said to my father that I did not want to be married, and that I would rather go back to the dear old mill; but he seemed to feel this speech of mine as dereliction of duty as great as if I had committed perjury; as if, after the ceremony of betrothal, no one had any right over me but my future husband. And yet he asked me some solemn questions; but my answers were not such as to do me any good.

"Dost thou know any fault or crime in this man that should prevent God's blessing from resting on thy marriage with him? Dost thou feel aversion or repugnance to him in any way?"

And to all this what could I say? I could only stammer out that I did not think I loved him enough; and my poor old father saw in this reluctance only the fancy of a silly girl who did not know her own mind, but who had now gone too far to recede.

So we were married, in the Court chapel, a privilege which Madame Rupprecht had used no end of efforts to obtain for us, and which she must have thought was to secure us all possible happiness, both at the time and in recollection afterwards.

We were married; and after two days spent in festivity at Carlsruhe, among all our new fashionable friends there, I bade good-bye for ever to my dear old father. I had begged my husband to take me by way of Heidelberg to his old castle in the Vosges; but I found an amount of determination, under that effeminate appearance and manner, for which I was not prepared, and he refused my first request so decidedly that I dared not urge it. "Henceforth, Anna," said he, "you will move in a different sphere of life; and, though it is possible that you may have the power of showing favour to your relations from time to time, yet much or familiar intercourse will be undesirable, and is what I cannot allow." I felt almost afraid, after this formal speech, of asking my father and Fritz to come and see me; but, when the agony of bidding them farewell overcame all

my prudence, I did beg them to pay me a visit ere long. But they shook their heads, and spoke of business at home, of different kinds of life, of my being a Frenchwoman now. Only my father broke out at last with a blessing, and said, "If my child is unhappy—which God forbid—let her remember that her father's house is ever open to her." I was on the point of crying out, "Oh, then take me there now, my father! oh, my father!" when I felt, rather than saw, my husband present near me. He looked on with a slightly contemptuous air; and, taking my hand in his, he led me weeping away, saying that short farewells were always the best when they were inevitable.

It took us two days to reach his château in the Vosges, for the roads were bad and the way difficult to ascertain. Nothing could be more devoted than he was all the time of the journey. It seemed as if he were trying in every way to make up for the separation which every hour made me feel the more complete between my present and my former life. I seemed as if I were only now wakening up to a full sense of what marriage was, and I dare say I was not a cheerful companion on the tedious journey. At length, jealousy of my regret for my father and brother got the better of M. de la Tourelle, and he became so much displeased with me that I thought my heart would break with the sense of desolation. So it was in no cheerful frame of mind that we approached Les Rochers, and I thought that perhaps it was because I was so unhappy that the place looked so dreary. On one side, the château looked like a raw new building, hastily run up for some immediate purpose, without any growth of trees or underwood near it, only the remains of the stone used for building, not yet cleared away from the immediate neighbourhood, although weeds and lichens had been suffered to grow near and over the heaps of rubbish; on the other, were the great rocks from which the place took its name, and rising close against them, as if almost a natural formation, was the old castle, whose building dated many centuries back.

It was not large nor grand, but it was strong and picturesque, and I used to wish that we lived in it rather than in the smart, half-furnished apartment in the new edifice, which had been hastily got ready for my reception. Incongruous as the two parts were, they were joined into a whole by means of intricate passages and unexpected doors, the exact positions of which I never fully understood. M. de la Tourelle led me to a suite of rooms set apart for me, and formally installed me in them, as in a domain of which I was sovereign. He apologised for the hasty preparation which was all he had been able to make for me, but promised, before I asked, or even thought of complaining, that they should be made as luxurious as heart could wish before many weeks had elapsed. But when, in the gloom of an autumnal evening, I caught my own face and figure reflected in all the mirrors, which showed only a mysterious background in the dim light of the many candles that failed to illuminate the great proportions of the half-furnished salon, I clung to M. de la Tourelle, and begged to be taken to the rooms he had occupied before his marriage, he seemed angry with me; although he affected to laugh, and so decidedly put aside the notion of my having any other rooms than these, that I trembled in silence at the fantastic figures and shapes which my imagination called up as peopling the background of those gloomy mirrors. There was my boudoir, a little less dreary, and my bedroom, with its grand and tarnished furniture, which I commonly made into my sitting-room, locking up the various doors which led into the boudoir, the salon, the passages—all but one, through which M. de la Tourelle always entered from his own apartments in the older part of the castle. But this preference of mine for occupying my bedroom annoyed M. de la Tourelle, I am sure, though he did not care to express his displeasure. He would always allure me back into the salon, which I disliked more and more, because of its complete separation from the rest of the building by the long passage into which all the doors of my apartment opened. This passage was closed by heavy doors and

portières, through which I could not hear a sound from the other parts of the house; and, of course, the servants could not hear any movement or cry of mine, unless expressly summoned. To a girl brought up, as I had been, in a household where every individual lived all day in the sight of every other member of the family, never wanting either cheerful words or the sense of silent companionship, this grand isolation of mine was very formidable; and the more so, because M. de la Tourelle, as landed proprietor, sportsman, and what not, was generally out of doors the greater part of every day, and sometimes for two or three days at a time. I had no pride to keep me from associating with the domestics; it would have been natural to me in many ways to have sought them out for a word of sympathy in those dreary days when I was left so entirely to myself, had they been like our kindly German servants. But I disliked them, one and all; I could not tell why. Some were civil, but there was a familiarity in their civility which repelled me; others were rude, and treated me more as if I were an intruder than their master's chosen wife; and yet of the two sets I liked these last the best.

The principal male servant belonged to this latter class. I was very much afraid of him, he had such an air of suspicious surliness about him in all he did for me; and yet M. de la Tourelle spoke of him as most valuable and faithful. Indeed, it sometimes struck me that Lefebvre ruled his master in some things; and this I could not make out. For, while M. de la Tourelle behaved towards me as if I were some precious toy or idol, to be cherished, and fostered, and petted, and indulged, I soon found out how little I, or, apparently, any one else, could bend the terrible will of the man who had on first acquaintance appeared to me too effeminate and languid to exert his will in the slightest particular. I had learnt to know his face better now; and to see that some vehement depth of feeling, the cause of which I could not fathom, made his grey eye glitter with pale light, and his lips contract, and his delicate cheek whiten on certain occasions.

But all had been so open and above-board at home, that I had no experience to help me to unravel any mysteries among those who lived under the same roof. I understood that I had made what Madame Rupprecht and her set would have called a great marriage, because I lived in a château with many servants, bound ostensibly to obey me as a mistress. I understood that M. de la Tourelle was fond enough of me in his way—proud of my beauty, I dare say (for he often enough spoke about it to me)—but he was also jealous, and suspicious, and uninfluenced by my wishes, unless they tallied with his own. I felt, at this time, as if I could have been fond of him, too, if he would have let me; but I was timid from my childhood, and, before long, my dread of his displeasure (coming down like thunder into the midst of his love, for such slight causes as a hesitation in reply, a wrong word, or a sigh for my father) conquered my natural inclination to love one who was so handsome, so accomplished, so indulgent and devoted. But if I could not please him when indeed I loved him, you may imagine how often I did wrong when I was so much afraid of him as to quietly avoid his company, for fear of his outbursts of passion. One thing I remember noticing: that, the more M. de la Tourelle was displeased with me, the more Lefebvre seemed to chuckle; and, when I was restored to favour, sometimes on as sudden an impulse as that which occasioned my disgrace, Lefebvre would look askance at me with his cold, malicious eyes; and once or twice at such times he spoke most disrespectfully to M. de la Tourelle.

I have almost forgotten to say that, in the early days of my life at Les Rochers, M. de la Tourelle, in contemptuous indulgent pity at my weakness in disliking the dreary grandeur of the salon, wrote up to the milliner in Paris from whom my *corbeille de mariage* had come, to desire her to look out for me a maid of middle age, experienced in the toilette, and with so much refinement that she might on occasion serve as companion to me.

PORTION II

A NORMAN woman, Amante by name, was sent to Les Rochers by the Paris milliner, to become my maid. She was tall and handsome, though upwards of forty, and somewhat gaunt. But, on first seeing her, I liked her; she was neither rude nor familiar in her manners, and had a pleasant look of straightforwardness about her that I had missed in all the inhabitants of the château, and had foolishly set down in my own mind as a national want. Amante was directed by M. de la Tourelle to sit in my boudoir, and to be always within call. He also gave her many instructions as to her duties in matters which, perhaps, strictly belonged to my department of management. But I was young and inexperienced, and thankful to be spared any responsibility.

I dare say it was true what M. de la Tourelle said—before many weeks had elapsed—that, for a great lady, a lady of a castle, I became sadly too familiar with my Norman waiting-maid. But you know that by birth we were not very far apart in rank: Amante was the daughter of a Norman farmer, I, of a German miller; and, besides that, my life was so lonely! It almost seemed as if I could not please my husband. He had written for some one capable of being my companion at times, and now he was jealous of my free regard for her—angry, because I could sometimes laugh at her original turns of speech and amusing proverbs, while, when with him, I was too much frightened to smile.

From time to time, families from a distance of some leagues drove through the bad roads in their heavy carriages to pay us a visit; and there was an occasional talk of our going to Paris when public affairs should be a little more settled. These little events and plans were the only variations in my life for the first twelve months, if I except the alternations in M. de la Tourelle's temper, his unreasonable anger, and his passionate fondness.

Perhaps one of the reasons that made me take pleasure and comfort in Amante's society was, that whereas I was afraid of everybody (I do not think I was half as much afraid of things as of persons), Amante feared no one. She would quietly beard Lefebvre, and he respected her all the more for it; she had a knack of putting questions to M. de la Tourelle, which respectfully informed him that she had detected the weak point, but forbore to press him too closely upon it out of deference to his position as her master. And, with all her shrewdness to others, she had quite tender ways with me; all the more so at this time because she knew, what I had not yet ventured to tell M. de la Tourelle, that by-and-by I might become a mother—that wonderful object of mysterious interest to single women, who no longer hope to enjoy such blessedness themselves.

It was once more autumn; late in October. But I was reconciled to my habitation; the walls of the new part of the building no longer looked bare and desolate; the *débris* had been so far cleared away by M. de la Tourelle's desire as to make me a little flower-garden, in which I tried to cultivate those plants that I remembered as growing at home. Amante and I had moved the furniture in the rooms, and adjusted it to our liking; my husband had ordered many an article from time to time that he thought would give me pleasure; and I was becoming tame to my apparent imprisonment in a certain part of the great building, the whole of which I had never yet explored. It was October, as I say, once more. The days were lovely, though short in duration, and M. de la Tourelle had occasion, so he said, to go to that distant estate, the superintendence of which so frequently took him away from home. He took Lefebvre with him, and possibly some more of the lacqueys; he often did. And my spirits rose a little at the thought of his absence; and then the new sensation that he was the father of my unborn babe came over me, and I tried to invest him with this fresh character. I tried to believe that it was his passionate love for me that made him so jealous and

tyrannical ; imposing, as he did, restrictions on my very correspondence with my dear father, from whom I was so entirely separated, as far as personal intercourse was concerned.

I had, it is true, let myself go into a sorrowful review of all the troubles which lay hidden beneath the seeming luxury of my life. I knew that no one cared for me, except my husband and Amante ; for it was clear enough to see that I, as his wife, and also as a *parvenue*, was not popular among the few neighbours who surrounded us ; and, as for the servants, the women were all hard and impudent-looking, treating me with a semblance of respect that had more of mockery than reality in it ; while the men had a lurking kind of fierceness about them, sometimes displayed even to M. de la Tourelle, who on his part, it must be confessed, was often severe, even to cruelty, in his management of them. My husband loved me, I said to myself ; but I said it almost in the form of a question. His love was shown fitfully, and more in ways calculated to please himself than to please me. I felt that for no wish of mine would he deviate one tittle from any pre-determined course of action. I had learnt the inflexibility of those thin delicate lips ; I knew how anger would turn his fair complexion to deadly white, and bring the cruel light into his pale blue eyes. The love I bore to any one seemed to be a reason for his hating them, and so I went on pitying myself, one long dreary afternoon during that absence of his of which I have spoken ; only sometimes remembering to check myself in my murmurings by thinking of the new unseen link between us, and then crying afresh to think how wicked I was. Oh, how well I remember that long October evening ! Amante came in from time to time, talking away to cheer me—talking about dress and Paris, and I hardly know what, but from time to time looking at me keenly with her friendly dark eyes, and with serious interest, too, though all her words were about frivolity. At length, she heaped the fire with wood, drew the heavy silken curtains close ; for I had been anxious hitherto to keep them open, so that I might see the

pale moon mounting the skies, as I used to see her—the same moon—rise from behind the Kaiserstuhl at Heidelberg; but the sight made me cry, so Amante shut it out. She dictated to me, as a nurse does to a child.

"Now madame must have the little kitten to keep her company," she said, "while I go and ask Marthon for a cup of coffee." I remember that speech, and the way it roused me; for I did not like Amante to think I wanted amusing by a kitten. It might be my petulance, but this speech—such as she might have made to a child—annoyed me, and I said that I had reason for my lowness of spirits; meaning that they were not of so imaginary a nature that I could be diverted from them by the gambols of a kitten. So, though I did not choose to tell her all, I told her a part; and, as I spoke, I began to suspect that the good creature knew much of what I withheld, and that the little speech about the kitten was more thoughtfully kind than it had seemed at first. I said that it was so long since I had heard from my father; that he was an old man, and so many things might happen—I might never see him again—and I so seldom heard from him or my brother. It was a more complete and total separation than I had ever anticipated when I married; and something of my home and of my life previous to my marriage I told the good Amante; for I had not been brought up as a great lady, and the sympathy of any human being was precious to me.

Amante listened with interest, and in return told me some of the events and sorrows of her own life. Then, remembering her purpose, she set out in search of the coffee, which ought to have been brought to me an hour before; but, in my husband's absence, my wishes were but seldom attended to, and I never dared to give orders.

Presently she returned, bringing the coffee and a large cake.

"See!" said she, setting it down. "Look at my plunder! Madame must eat. Those who eat always laugh. And, besides, I have a little news that will please madame." Then

she told me that, lying on a table in the great kitchen, there was a bundle of letters, come by the courier from Strasburg that very afternoon; that, fresh from her conversation with me, she had hastily untied the string that bound them, but had only just traced out one that she thought was from Germany, when a servant-man came in, and, with the start he gave her, she dropped the letters, which he picked up, swearing at her for having untied and disarranged them. She told him that she believed there was a letter there for her mistress; but he only swore the more, saying that, if there was, it was no business of hers, or of his either; for that he had the strictest orders always to take all letters that arrived during his master's absence into the private sitting-room of the latter—a room into which I had never entered, although it opened out of my husband's dressing-room.

I asked Amante if she had not conquered and brought me this letter. No, indeed, she replied; it was almost as much as her life was worth to live among such a set of servants; it was only a month ago that Jacques had stabbed Valentin for some jesting talk. Had I never missed Valentin—that handsome young lad who carried up the wood into my salon? Poor fellow! he lies dead and cold now, and they said in the village he had put an end to himself; but those of the household knew better. Oh! I need not be afraid; Jacques was gone no one knew where; but with such people it was not safe to upbraid or insist. Monsieur would be at home the next day, and it would not be long to wait.

But I felt as if I could not exist till the next day without the letter. It might be to say that my father was ill, dying—he might cry for his daughter from his death-bed! In short, there was no end to the thoughts and fancies that haunted me. It was of no use for Amante to say that, after all, she might be mistaken—that she did not read writing well—that she had had but a glimpse of the address; I let my coffee cool, my food all became distasteful, and I wrung my hands with impatience to get at the letter, and

have some news of my dear ones at home. All the time, Amante kept her imperturbable good temper; first reasoning, then scolding. At last she said, as if wearied out, that, if I would consent to make a good supper, she would see what could be done as to our going to monsieur's room in search of the letter, after the servants were all gone to bed. We agreed to go together, when all was still, and look over the letters; there could be no harm in that; and yet, somehow, we were such cowards we dared not do it openly and in the face of the household.

Presently my supper came up—partridges, bread, fruits, and cream. How well I remember that supper! We put the untouched cake away in a sort of buffet, and poured the cold coffee out of the window, in order that the servants might not take offence at the apparent fancifulness of sending down for food I could not eat. I was so anxious for all to be in bed, that I told the footman who served that he need not wait to take away the plates and dishes, but might go to bed. Long after I thought the house was quiet, Amante, in her caution, made me wait. It was past eleven, before we set out, with cat-like steps and veiled light, along the passages, to go to my husband's room and steal my own letter, if it was indeed there: a fact about which Amante had become very uncertain in the progress of our discussion.

To make you understand my story, I must now try to explain to you the plan of the château. It had been at one time a fortified place of some strength, perched on the summit of a rock, which projected from the side of the mountain. But additions had been made to the old building (which must have borne a strong resemblance to the castles overhanging the Rhine); and these new buildings were placed so as to command a magnificent view, being on the steepest side of the rock, from which the mountain fell away, as it were, leaving the great plain of France in full survey. The ground-plan was something of the shape of three sides of an oblong; my apartments in the modern edifice occupied the narrow end, and had this grand prospect. The front of the

castle was old, and ran parallel to the road far below. In this were contained the offices and public rooms of various descriptions, into which I never penetrated. The back wing (considering the new building, in which my apartments were, as the centre) consisted of many rooms, of a dark and gloomy character; as the mountain-side shut out much of the sun, and heavy pine woods came down within a few yards of the windows. Yet on this side—on a projecting plateau of the rock—my husband had formed the flower-garden of which I have spoken; for he was a great cultivator of flowers in his leisure moments.

Now, my bedroom was the corner-room of the new buildings, on the part next to the mountain. Hence I could have let myself down into the flower-garden by my hands on the window-sill on one side, without danger of hurting myself; while the windows at right angles with these looked sheer down a descent of a hundred feet at least. Going still farther along this wing, you came to the old building; in fact, these two fragments of the ancient castle had formerly been attached by some such connecting apartments as my husband had rebuilt. These rooms belonged to M. de la Tourelle. His bedroom opened into mine, his dressing-room lay beyond; and that was pretty nearly all I knew, for the servants, as well as he himself, had a knack of turning me back, under some pretence, if ever they found me walking about alone, as I was inclined to do, when first I came, from a sort of curiosity to see the whole of the place of which I found myself mistress. M. de la Tourelle never encouraged me to go out alone, either in a carriage or for a walk, saying always that the roads were unsafe in those disturbed times; indeed, I have sometimes fancied since that the flower-garden, to which the only access from the castle was through his rooms, was designed in order to give me exercise and employment under his own eye.

But, to return to that night. I knew, as I have said, that M. de la Tourelle's private room opened out of his dressing-room, and this out of his bedroom, which again

opened into mine, the corner-room. But there were other doors into all these rooms, and these doors led into a long gallery, lighted by windows, looking into the inner court. I do not remember our consulting much about it; we went through my room into my husband's apartment through the dressing-room; but the door of communication into his study was locked—so there was nothing for it but to turn back and go by the gallery to the other door. I recollect noticing one or two things in these rooms, then seen by me for the first time. I remember the sweet perfume that hung in the air, the scent-bottles of silver that decked his toilet-table, and the whole apparatus for bathing and dressing, more luxurious even than those which he had provided for me. But the room itself was less splendid in its proportions than mine. In truth, the new buildings ended at the entrance to my husband's dressing-room. There were deep window-recesses in walls eight or nine feet thick, and even the partitions between the chambers were three feet deep; but over all these doors or windows there fell thick, heavy draperies, so that I should think no one could have heard in one room what passed in another. We went back into my room, and out into the gallery. We had to shade our candle, from a fear that possessed us, I don't know why, lest some of the servants in the opposite wing might trace our progress towards the part of the castle unused by any one except my husband. Somehow, I had always the feeling that all the domestics, except Amante, were spies upon me, and that I was trammelled in a web of observation, with unspoken limitations, extending over all my actions.

There was a light in the upper room; we paused, and Amante would have again retreated; but I was chafing under the delays. What was the harm of my seeking my father's unopened letter to me in my husband's study? I, generally the coward, now blamed Amante for her unusual timidity. But the truth was, she had far more reason for suspicion as to the proceedings of that terrible household than I had ever known of. I urged her on, I pressed on myself; we came

to the door, locked, but with the key in it; we turned it, we entered; the letters lay on the table, their white oblongs catching the light in an instant, and revealing themselves to my eager eyes, hungering after the words of love from my peaceful, distant home. But, just as I pressed forward to examine the letters, the candle which Amante held caught in some draught, went out, and we were in darkness. Amante proposed that we should carry the letters back to my salon, collecting them as well as we could in the dark, and returning all but the expected one for me; but I begged her to return to my room, where I kept tinder and flint, and to strike a fresh light; and so she went, and I remained alone in the room, of which I could only just distinguish the size, and the principal articles of furniture: a large table, with a deep, overhanging cloth, in the middle, escritoires and other heavy articles against the walls. All this I could see as I stood there, my hand on the table close by the letters, my face towards the window, which, both from the darkness of the wood, growing high up the mountain-side, and the faint light of the declining moon, seemed only like an oblong of paler, purpler black than the shadowy room. How much I remembered from my one instantaneous glance before the candle went out, how much I saw as my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, I do not know; but even now, in my dreams, comes up that room of horror, distinct in its profound shadow. Amante could hardly have been gone a minute, before I felt an additional gloom before the window, and heard soft movements outside—soft, but resolute, and continued until the end was accomplished, and the window raised.

In mortal terror of people forcing an entrance at such an hour, and in such a manner as to leave no doubt of their purpose, I would have turned to fly when first I heard the noise; only that I feared by any quick motion to catch their attention, as I also ran the danger of doing by opening the door, which was all but closed, and to whose handlings I was unaccustomed. Again, quick as lightning, I bethought

me of the hiding-place between the locked door to my husband's dressing-room and the portière which covered it; but I gave that up: I felt as if I could not reach it without screaming or fainting. So I sank down softly, and crept under the table; hidden, as I hoped, by the great, deep table-cover, with its heavy fringe. I had not recovered my swooning senses fully, and was trying to reassure myself as to my being in a place of comparative safety; for, above all things, I dreaded the betrayal of fainting, and struggled hard for such courage as I might attain by deadening myself to the danger I was in by inflicting intense pain on myself. You have often asked me the reason of that mark on my hand; it was where, in my agony, I bit out a piece of flesh with my relentless teeth, thankful for the pain, which helped to numb my terror. I say, I was but just concealed, when I heard the window lifted, and one after another stepped over the sill, and stood by me so close, that I could have touched their feet. Then they laughed and whispered; my brain swam so that I could not tell the meaning of their words; but I heard my husband's laughter among the rest—low, hissing, scornful—as he kicked something heavy that they had dragged in over the floor, and which lay near me: so near, that my husband's kick, in touching it, touched me too. I don't know why—I can't tell how—but some feeling, and not curiosity, prompted me to put out my hand, ever so softly, ever so little, and feel in the darkness for what lay spurned beside me. I stole my groping palm upon the clenched and chilly hand of a corpse!

Strange to say, this roused me to instant vividness of thought. Till this moment, I had almost forgotten Amante; now, I planned with feverish rapidity how I could give her a warning not to return; or rather, I should say, I tried to plan; for all my projects were utterly futile, as I might have seen from the first. I could only hope she could hear the voices of those who were now busy in trying to kindle a light, swearing awful oaths at the mislaid articles which would have enabled them to strike fire. I heard her step

outside coming nearer and nearer; I saw from my hiding-place the line of light beneath the door more and more distinctly; close to it her footstep paused; the men inside—at the time I thought they had been only two, but I found out afterwards there were three—paused in their endeavours, and were quite still, as breathless as myself, I suppose. Then she slowly pushed the door open with gentle motion, to save her flickering candle from being again extinguished. For a moment all was still. Then I heard my husband say, as he advanced towards her (he wore riding boots, the shape of which I knew well, as I could see them in the light)—

"Amante, may I ask what brings you here into my private room?"

He stood between her and the dead body of a man, from which ghastly heap I shrank away as it almost touched me; so close were we all together. I could not tell whether she saw it or not; I could give her no warning, nor make any dumb utterance of signs to bid her what to say—if, indeed, I knew myself what would be best for her to say.

Her voice was quite changed when she spoke; quite hoarse, and very low; yet it was steady enough as she said, what was the truth, that she had come to look for a letter which she believed had arrived for me from Germany. Good, brave Amante! Not a word about me. M. de la Tourelle answered with a grim blasphemy and a fearful threat. He would have no one prying into his premises; madame should have her letters, if there were any, when he chose to give them to her; if, indeed, he thought it well to give them to her at all. As for Amante, this was her first warning, but it was also her last; and, taking the candle out of her hand, he turned her out of the room, his companions discreetly making a screen, so as to throw the corpse into deep shadow. I heard the key turn in the door after her—if I had ever had any thought of escape, it was gone now. I only hoped that whatever was to befall me might soon be over, for the tension of nerve was growing more than I could bear. The instant she could be supposed to be out of hearing, two voices began

speaking in the most angry terms to my husband, upbraiding him for not having detained her, gagged her—nay, one was for killing her, saying he had seen her eye fall on the face of the dead man, whom he now kicked in his passion. Though the form of their speech was as if they were speaking to equals, yet in their tone there was something of fear. I am sure my husband was their superior, or captain, or somewhat. He replied to them, almost as if he were scoffing at them, saying it was such an expenditure of labour having to do with fools; that, ten to one, the woman was only telling the simple truth, and that she was frightened enough by discovering her master in his room to be thankful to escape and return to her mistress, to whom he could easily explain on the morrow how he happened to return in the dead of night. But his companions fell to cursing me, and saying that, since M. de la Tourelle had been married, he was fit for nothing but to dress himself fine and scent himself with perfume; that, as for me, they could have got him twenty girls prettier, and with far more spirit in them. He quietly answered that I suited him, and that was enough. All this time they were doing something—I could not see what—to the corpse; sometimes, they were too busy rifling the dead body, I believe, to talk; again, they let it fall with a heavy, resistless thud, and took to quarrelling. They taunted my husband with angry vehemence, enraged at his scoffing and scornful replies, his mocking laughter. Yes; holding up his poor dead victim, the better to strip him of whatever he wore that was valuable, I heard my husband laugh just as he had done when exchanging repartees in the little salon of the Rupprechts at Carlsruhe. I hated and dreaded him from that moment. At length, as if to make an end of the subject, he said, with cool determination in his voice—

"Now, my good friends, what is the use of all this talking, when you know in your hearts that, if I suspected my wife of knowing more than I chose of my affairs, she would not outlive the day? Remember Victorine! Because she merely joked about my affairs in an imprudent manner,

and rejected my advice to keep a prudent tongue—to see what she liked, but ask nothing and say nothing—she has gone a long journey—longer than to Paris."

"But this one is different to her; we knew all that Madame Victorine knew, she was such a chatterbox; but this one may find out a vast deal, and never breathe a word about it, she is so sly. Some fine day, we may have the country raised, and the gendarmes down upon us from Strasburg, and all owing to your pretty doll, with her cunning ways of coming over you."

I think this roused M. de la Tourelle a little from his contemptuous indifference, for he ground an oath through his teeth, and said, "Feel! this dagger is sharp, Henri. If my wife breathes a word, and I am such a fool as not to have stopped her mouth effectually before she can bring down gendarmes upon us, just let that good steel find its way to my heart. Let her guess but one tittle, let her have but one slight suspicion that I am not a '*grand propriétaire*,' much less imagine that I am a chief of *Chauffeurs*, and she follows Victorine on the long journey beyond Paris that very day."

"She'll outwit you yet; or I never judged women well. Those still, silent ones are the devil. She'll be off during some of your absences, having picked out some secret that will break us all on the wheel."

"Bah!" said his voice; and then in a minute he added, "Let her go, if she will! But, where she goes, I will follow; so don't cry before you're hurt."

By this time, they had nearly stripped the body; and the conversation turned on what they should do with it. I learnt that the dead man was the Sieur de Poissy, a neighbouring gentleman, whom I had often heard of as hunting with my husband. I had never seen him; but they spoke as if he had come upon them while they were robbing some Cologne merchant, torturing him after the cruel practice of the *Chauffeurs*, by roasting the feet of their victims, in order to compel them to reveal any hidden circumstances connected with their wealth, of which the *Chauffeurs* afterwards

made use; and this Sieur de Poissy coming down upon them, and recognising M. de la Tourelle, they had killed him, and brought him thither after nightfall. I heard him whom I called my husband laugh his little light laugh, as he spoke of the way in which the dead body had been strapped before one of the riders, in such a way that it appeared to any passer-by as if, in truth, the murderer were tenderly supporting some sick person. He repeated some mocking reply of double meaning, which he himself had given to some one who had made inquiry. He enjoyed the play upon words, softly applauding his own wit. And, all the time, the poor helpless outstretched arms of the dead lay close to his dainty boot! Then another stooped (my heart stopped beating), and picked up a letter lying on the ground —a letter that had dropped out of M. de Poissy's pocket— a letter from his wife, full of tender words of endearment and pretty babblings of love. This was read aloud, with coarse, ribald comments on every sentence, each trying to outdo the previous speaker. When they came to some pretty words about a sweet Maurice, their little child away with its mother on some visit, they laughed at M. de la Tourelle, and told him that he would be hearing such woman's drivelling some day. Up to that moment, I think, I had only feared him; but his unnatural, half-ferocious reply made me hate even more than I dreaded him. But now they grew weary of their savage merriment; the jewels and watch had been appraised, the money and papers examined; and apparently there was some necessity for the body being interred quietly and before daybreak. They had not dared to leave him where he was slain, for fear lest people should come and recognise him, and raise the hue and cry upon them. For they all along spoke as if it was their constant endeavour to keep the immediate neighbourhood of Les Rochers in the most orderly and tranquil condition, so as never to give cause for visits from the gendarmes. They disputed a little as to whether they should make their way into the castle-larder through the gallery, and satisfy their

hunger before the hasty interment, or afterwards. I listened with eager feverish interest, as soon as this meaning of their speeches reached my hot and troubled brain; for, at the time, the words they uttered seemed only to stamp themselves with terrible force on my memory, so that I could hardly keep from repeating them aloud like a dull, miserable, unconscious echo; but my brain was numb to the sense of what they said, unless I myself were named; and then, I suppose, some instinct of self-preservation stirred within me, and quickened my sense. And how I strained my ears, and nerved my hands and limbs, beginning to twitch with convulsive movements, which I feared might betray me! I gathered every word they spoke, not knowing which proposal to wish for, but feeling that, whatever was finally decided upon, my only chance of escape was drawing near. I once feared lest my husband should go to his bedroom before I had had that one chance, in which case he would most likely have perceived my absence. He said that his hands were soiled (I shuddered, for it might be with life-blood), and he would go and cleanse them; but some bitter jest turned his purpose, and he left the room with the other two—left it by the gallery door. Left me alone in the dark with the stiffening corpse!

Now, now was my time, if ever; and yet I could not move. It was not my cramped and stiffened joints that crippled me; it was the sensation of that dead man's close presence. I almost fancied—I almost fancy still—I heard the arm nearest to me move, lift itself up, as if once more imploring, and fall in dead despair. At that fancy—if fancy it were—I screamed aloud in mad terror, and the sound of my own strange voice broke the spell. I drew myself to the side of the table farthest from the corpse, with as much slow caution as if I really could have feared the clutch of that poor dead arm, powerless for evermore. I softly raised myself up, and stood sick and trembling, holding by the table, too dizzy to know what to do next. I nearly fainted, when a low voice spoke—when Amante, from the outside of

the door, whispered, "Madame!" The faithful creature had been on the watch; had heard my scream; and, having seen the three ruffians troop along the gallery, down the stairs, and across the court to the offices in the other wing of the castle, she had stolen to the door of the room in which I was. The sound of her voice gave me strength; I walked straight towards it, as one benighted on a dreary moor, suddenly perceiving the small steady light which tells of human dwellings, takes heart, and steers straight onward. Where I was, where that voice was, I knew not; but go to it I must, or die! The door once opened—I know not by which of us—I fell upon her neck, grasping her tight, till my hands ached with the tension of their hold. Yet she never uttered a word. Only she took me up in her vigorous arms, and bore me to my room, and laid me on my bed. I do not know more; as soon as I was placed there I lost sense; I came to myself with a horrible dread lest my husband was by me, with a belief that he was in the room, in hiding, waiting to hear my first words, watching for the least sign of the terrible knowledge I possessed to murder me. I dared not breathe quicker; I measured and timed each heavy inspiration; I did not speak, nor move, nor even open my eyes, for long after I was in my full, my miserable senses. I heard some one treading softly about the room, as if with a purpose, not as if for curiosity, or merely to beguile the time; some one passed in and out of the salon; and I still lay quiet, feeling as if death were inevitable, but wishing that the agony of death were past. Again faintness stole over me; but, just as I was sinking into the horrible feeling of nothingness, I heard Amante's voice close to me, saying—

"Drink this, madame, and let us be gone! All is ready."

I let her put her arm under my head and raise me, and pour something down my throat. All the time, she kept talking in a quiet, measured voice, unlike her own, so dry and authoritative; she told me that a suit of her clothes lay

ready for me; that she herself was as much disguised as the circumstances permitted her to be; that what provisions I had left from my supper were stowed away in her pockets; and so she went on, dwelling on little details of the most commonplace description, but never alluding for an instant to the fearful cause why flight was necessary. I made no inquiry as to how she knew, or what she knew. I never asked her either then or afterwards; I could not bear it—we kept our dreadful secret close. But I suppose she must have been in the dressing-room adjoining and heard all.

In fact, I dared not speak even to her, as if there were anything beyond the most common event in life in our preparing thus to leave the house of blood by stealth in the dead of night. She gave me directions—short, condensed directions, without reasons—just as you do to a child; and, like a child, I obeyed her. She went often to the door and listened; and often, too, she went to the window and looked anxiously out. For me, I saw nothing but her, and I dared not let my eyes wander from her for a minute; and I heard nothing in the deep midnight silence but her soft movements, and the heavy beating of my own heart. At last she took my hand, and led me in the dark, through the salon, once more into the terrible gallery, where across the black darkness the windows admitted pale sheeted ghosts of light upon the floor. Clinging to her, I went; unquestioning—for she was human sympathy to me, after the isolation of my unspeakable terror. On we went, turning to the left instead of to the right, past my suite of sitting-rooms, where the gilding was red with blood, into that unknown wing of the castle that fronted the main road, lying parallel far below. She guided me along the basement passages to which we had now descended, until we came to a little open door, through which the air blew chill and cold, bringing for the first time a sensation of life to me. The door led into a kind of cellar, through which we groped our way to an opening like a window, but which, instead of being glazed, was only fenced with iron bars, two of which were loose, as Amante evidently knew; for she took

them out with the ease of one who had performed the action often before, and then helped me to follow her out into the free, open air.

We stole round the end of the building, and on turning the corner—she first—I felt her hold on me tighten for an instant, and the next step I, too, heard distant voices, and the blows of a spade upon the heavy soil; for the night was very warm and still.

We had not spoken a word; we did not speak now. Touch was safer and as expressive. She turned down towards the high road; I followed. I did not know the path; we stumbled again and again, and I was much bruised; so doubtless was she; but bodily pain did me good. At last, we were on the plainer path of the high road.

I had such faith in her that I did not venture to speak, even when she paused, as wondering to which hand she would turn. But now, for the first time, she spoke—

"Which way did you come, when he brought you here first?"

I pointed—I could not speak.

We turned in the opposite direction; still going along the high road. In about an hour, we struck up to the mountain-side, scrambling far up before we even dared to rest; far up, and away again, before day had fully dawned. Then we looked about for some place of rest and concealment; and now we dared to speak in whispers. Amante told me that she had locked the door of communication between his bedroom and mine; and, as in a dream, I was aware that she had also locked and brought away the key of the door between the latter and the salon.

"He will have been too busy this night to think much about you—he will suppose you are asleep—I shall be the first to be missed; but they will only just now be discovering our loss."

I remember those last words of hers made me pray to go on; I felt as if we were losing precious time in thinking either of rest or concealment; but she hardly replied to me,

so busy was she in seeking out some hiding-place. At length, giving it up in despair, we proceeded onwards a little way; the mountain-side sloped downwards rapidly; and in the full morning light we saw ourselves in a narrow valley, made by a stream which forced its way along it. About a mile lower down, there rose the pale blue smoke of a village; a mill-wheel was lashing up the water close at hand, though out of sight. Keeping under the cover of every sheltering tree or bush, we worked our way down past the mill, down to a one-arched bridge which doubtless formed part of the road between the village and the mill.

"This will do," said she; and we crept under the space; and, climbing a little way up the rough stone-work, we seated ourselves on a projecting ledge, and crouched in the deep damp shadow. Amante sat a little above me, and made me lay my head on her lap. Then she fed me, and took some food herself; and, opening out her great dark cloak, she covered up every light-coloured speck about us; and thus we sat, shivering and shuddering, yet feeling a kind of rest through it all, simply from the fact that motion was no longer imperative, and that during the daylight our only chance of safety was to be still. But the damp shadow in which we were sitting was blighting, from the circumstance of the sunlight never penetrating there; and I dreaded lest, before night and the time for exertion again came on, I should feel illness creeping all over me. To add to our discomfort, it had rained the whole day long; and the stream, fed by a thousand little mountain brooklets, began to swell into a torrent, rushing over the stones with a perpetual and dizzying noise.

Every now and then I was wakened from the painful doze into which I continually fell, by a sound of horses' feet over our head: sometimes lumbering heavily as if dragging a burden, sometimes rattling and galloping, and with the sharper cry of men's voices coming cutting through the roar of the waters. At length, day fell. We had to drop into the stream, which came above our knees as we waded to the

bank. There we stood, stiff and shivering. Even Amante's courage seemed to fail.

"We must pass this night in shelter, somehow," said she. For indeed the rain was coming down pitilessly. I said nothing. I thought that surely the end must be death in some shape; and I only hoped that to death might not be added the terror of the cruelty of men. In a minute or so, she had resolved on her course of action. We went up the stream to the mill. The familiar sounds, the scent of the wheat, the flour whitening the walls—all reminded me of home, and it seemed to me as if I must struggle out of this nightmare and waken, and find myself once more a happy girl by the Neckar-side. They were long in unbarring the door at which Amante had knocked; at length, an old feeble voice inquired who was there, and what was sought? Amante answered shelter from the storm for two women; but the old woman replied, with suspicious hesitation, that she was sure it was a man who was asking for shelter, and that she could not let us in. But at length she satisfied herself, and unbarred the heavy door, and admitted us. She was not an unkindly woman; but her thoughts all travelled in one circle, and that was, that her master, the miller, had told her on no account to let any man into the place during his absence, and that she did not know if he would not think two women as bad; and yet that, as we were not men, no one could say she had disobeyed him; for it was a shame to let a dog be out such a night as this. Amante, with ready wit, told her to let no one know that we had taken shelter there that night, and that then her master could not blame her; and, while she was thus enjoining secrecy as the wisest course, with a view to far other people than the miller, she was hastily helping me take off my wet clothes, and spreading them, as well as the brown mantle that had covered us both, before the great stove which warmed the room with the effectual heat that the old woman's failing vitality required. All this time the poor creature was discussing with herself as to whether she had disobeyed orders, in a kind of garrulous way that made

me fear much for her capability of retaining anything secret if she was questioned. By-and-by, she wandered away to an unnecessary revelation of her master's whereabouts; gone to help in the search for his landlord, the Sieur de Poissy, who lived at the château just above, and who had not returned from his chase the day before; so the *intendant* imagined he might have met with some accident, and had summoned the neighbours to beat the forest and the hill-side. She told us much besides, giving us to understand that she would fain meet with a place as housekeeper where there were more servants and less to do, as her life here was very lonely and dull, especially since her master's son had gone away—gone to the wars. She then took her supper, which was evidently apportioned out to her with a sparing hand, as, even if the idea had come into her head, she had not enough to offer us any. Fortunately, warmth was all that we required; and that, thanks to Amante's care, was returning to our chilled bodies. After supper, the old woman grew drowsy; but she seemed uncomfortable at the idea of going to sleep and leaving us still in the house. Indeed, she gave us pretty broad hints as to the propriety of our going once more out into the bleak and stormy night; but we begged to be allowed to stay under shelter of some kind; and, at last, a bright idea came over her, and she bade us mount by a ladder to a kind of loft, which went half over the lofty mill-kitchen in which we were sitting. We obeyed her—what else could we do?—and found ourselves in a spacious floor, without any safeguard or wall, boarding, or railing, to keep us from falling over into the kitchen, in case we went too near the edge. It was, in fact, the store-room or garret for the household. There was bedding piled up, boxes and chests, mill-sacks, the winter store of apples and nuts, bundles of old clothes, broken furniture, and many other things. No sooner were we up there, than the old woman dragged the ladder, by which we had ascended, away with a chuckle, as if she was now secure that we could do no mischief, and sat herself down again once more, to doze

and await her master's return. We pulled out some bedding, and gladly laid ourselves down in our dried clothes and in some warmth, hoping to have the sleep we so much needed to refresh us and prepare us for the next day. But I could not sleep, and I was aware, from her breathing, that Amante was equally wakeful. We could both see through the crevices between the boards that formed the flooring into the kitchen below, very partially lighted by the common lamp that hung against the wall near the stove, on the opposite side to that on which we were.

PORTION III

Far on in the night there were voices outside reached us in our hiding-place; an angry knocking at the door, and we saw through the chinks the old woman rouse herself up to go and open it for her master, who came in, evidently half drunk. To my sick horror, he was followed by Lefebvre, apparently as sober and wily as ever. They were talking together as they came in, disputing about something; but the miller stopped the conversation to swear at the old woman for having fallen asleep, and, with tipsy anger, and even with blows, drove the poor old creature out of the kitchen to bed. Then he and Lefebvre went on talking—about the Sieur de Poissy's disappearance. It seemed that Lefebvre had been out all day, along with other of my husband's men, ostensibly assisting in the search; in all probability trying to blind the Sieur de Poissy's followers by putting them on a wrong scent, and also, I fancied, from one or two of Lefebvre's sly questions, combining with this the hidden purpose of discovering us.

Although the miller was tenant and vassal to the Sieur de Poissy, he seemed to me to be much more in league with the people of M. de la Tourelle. He was evidently aware,

in part, of the life which Lefebvre and the others led; although, again, I do not suppose that he knew or imagined one-half of their crimes; and also, I think, he was seriously interested in discovering the fate of his master, little suspecting Lefebvre of murder or violence. He kept talking himself, and letting out all sorts of thoughts and opinions; watched by the keen eyes of Lefebvre, gleaming out below his shaggy eyebrows. It was evidently not the cue of the latter to let out that his master's wife had escaped from that vile and terrible den; but, though he never breathed a word relating to us, not the less was I certain he was thirsting for our blood, and lying in wait for us at every turn of events. Presently he got up and took his leave; and the miller bolted him out, and stumbled off to bed. Then we fell asleep, and slept loud and long.

The next morning, when I awoke, I saw Amante, half raised, resting on one hand, and eagerly gazing, with straining eyes, into the kitchen below. I looked too, and both heard and saw the miller and two of his men eagerly and loudly talking about the old woman, who had not appeared as usual to make the fire in the stove, and prepare her master's breakfast, and who now, late on in the morning, had been found dead in her bed; whether from the effect of her master's blows the night before, or from natural causes, who can tell? The miller's conscience upbraided him a little, I should say; for he was eagerly declaring his value for his housekeeper, and repeating how often she had spoken of the happy life she led with him. The men might have had their doubts; but they did not wish to offend the miller, and all agreed that the necessary steps should be taken for a speedy funeral. And so they went out, leaving us in our loft, but so much alone, that, for the first time almost, we ventured to speak freely, though still in a hushed voice, pausing to listen continually. Amante took a more cheerful view of the whole occurrence than I did. She said that, had the old woman lived, we should have had to depart that morning, and that this quiet departure would have been the

best thing we could have had to hope for, as, in all probability, the housekeeper would have told her master of us and of our resting-place, and this fact would, sooner or later, have been brought to the knowledge of those from whom we most desired to keep it concealed; but that now we had time to rest, and a shelter to rest in, during the first hot pursuit, which we knew to a fatal certainty was being carried on. The remnants of our food, and the stored-up fruit, would supply us with provision; the only thing to be feared was, that something might be required from the loft, and the miller or some one else mount up in search of it. But even then, with a little arrangement of boxes and chests, one part might be so kept in shadow that we might yet escape observation. All this comforted me a little; but, I asked, how were we ever to escape? The ladder was taken away, which was our only means of descent. But Amante replied that she could make a sufficient ladder of the rope lying coiled among other things, to drop us down the ten feet or so—with the advantage of its being portable, so that we might carry it away, and thus avoid all betrayal of the fact that any one had ever been hidden in the loft.

During the two days that intervened before we did escape, Amante made good use of her time. She looked into every box and chest during the man's absence at his mill; and, finding in one box an old suit of man's clothes, which had probably belonged to the miller's absent son, she put them on to see if they would fit her; and, when she found that they did, she cut her own hair to the shortness of a man's, made me clip her black eyebrows as close as though they had been shaved, and by cutting up old corks into pieces such as would go into her cheeks, she altered both the shape of her face and her voice to a degree which I should not have believed possible.

All this time I lay like one stunned; my body resting and renewing its strength, but I myself in an almost idiotic state—else surely I could not have taken the stupid interest which I remember I did in all Amante's energetic

preparations for disguise. I absolutely recollect once the feeling of a smile coming over my stiff face, as some new exercise of her cleverness proved a success.

But, towards the second day, she required me, too, to exert myself; and then all my heavy despair returned. I let her dye my fair hair and complexion with the decaying shells of the stored-up walnuts, I let her blacken my teeth, and even voluntarily broke a front-tooth, the better to effect my disguise. But, through it all, I had no hope of evading my terrible husband. The third night, the funeral was over, the drinking ended, the guests gone; the miller put to bed by his men, being too drunk to help himself. They stopped a little while in the kitchen talking and laughing about the new housekeeper likely to come; and they, too, went off shutting, but not locking the door. Everything favoured us. Amante had tried her ladder on one of the two previous nights, and could, by a dexterous throw from beneath, unfasten it from the hook to which it was fixed, when it had served its office; she made up a bundle of worthless old clothes, in order that we might the better preserve our characters of a travelling pedlar and his wife; she stuffed a hump on her back, she thickened my figure, she left her own clothes deep down beneath a heap of others in the chest from which she had taken the man's dress which she wore; and, with a few francs in her pocket—the sole money we had either of us had about us when we escaped—we let ourselves down the ladder, unhooked it, and passed into the cold darkness of night again.

We had discussed the route which it would be well for us to take while we lay *perdues* in our loft. Amante had told me then that her reason for inquiring, when we first left Les Rochers, by which way I had first been brought to it, was to avoid the pursuit which she was sure would first be made in the direction of Germany; but that now she thought we might return to that district of country, where my German fashion of speaking French would excite least observation. I thought that Amante herself had something peculiar in her

accent, which I had heard M. de la Tourelle sneer at as Norman patois; but I said not a word beyond agreeing to her proposal that we should bend our steps towards Germany. Once there we should, I thought, be safe. Alas! I forgot the unruly time that was overspreading all Europe, overturning all law, and all the protection which law gives.

How we wandered—not daring to ask our way—how we lived, how we struggled through many a danger and still more terrors of danger, I shall not tell you now. I will only relate two of our adventures before we reached Frankfort. The first, although fatal to an innocent lady, was yet, I believe, the cause of my safety; the second I shall tell you, that you may understand why I did not return to my former home, as I had hoped to do when we lay in the miller's loft, and I first became capable of groping after an idea of what my future life might be. I cannot tell you how much in these doubtings and wanderings I became attached to Amante. I have sometimes feared since, that I cared for her only because she was so necessary to my own safety; but, no! it was not so; or not so only or principally. She said once, that she was flying for her own life as well as for mine; but we dared not speak much on our danger, or on the horrors that had gone before. We planned a little what was to be our future course; but even for that we did not look forward long; how could we, when every day we scarcely knew if we should see the sun go down? For Amante knew or conjectured far more than I did of the atrocity of the gang to which M. de la Tourelle belonged; and every now and then, just as we seemed to be sinking into the calm of security, we fell upon traces of a pursuit after us in all directions. Once, I remember—we must have been nearly three weeks wearily walking through unfrequented ways, day after day, not daring to make inquiry as to our whereabouts, nor yet to seem purposeless in our wanderings—we came to a kind of lonely roadside farrier's and blacksmith's. I was so tired that Amante declared that, come what might, we would stay there all night; and accordingly she entered

the house, and boldly announced herself as a travelling tailor, ready to do any odd jobs of work that might be required, for a night's lodging and food for himself and wife. She had adopted this plan once or twice before, and with good success; for her father had been a tailor in Rouen, and as a girl she had often helped him with his work, and knew the tailor's slang and habits, down to the particular whistle and cry which in France tells so much to those of a trade. At this blacksmith's, as at most other solitary houses far away from a town, there was not only a store of men's clothes laid by as wanting mending when the housewife could afford time, but there was a natural craving after news from a distance, such news as a wandering tailor is bound to furnish. The early November afternoon was closing into evening, as we sat down: she cross-legged on the great table in the blacksmith's kitchen, drawn close to the window, I close behind her, sewing at another part of the same garment, and from time to time well scolded by my seeming husband. All at once she turned round to speak to me. It was only one word, "Courage!" I had seen nothing; I sat out of the light; but I turned sick for an instant, and then I braced myself up into a strange strength of endurance, to go through I knew not what.

The blacksmith's forge was in a shed beside the house, and fronting the road. I heard the hammers stop plying their continual rhythmical beat. She had seen why they ceased. A rider had come up to the forge and dismounted, leading his horse in to be re-shod. The broad red light of the forge-fire had revealed the face of the rider to Amante; and she apprehended the consequence that really ensued.

The rider, after some words with the blacksmith, was ushered in by him into the house-place where we sat.

"Here, good-wife, a cup of wine and some galette for this gentleman!"

"Anything, anything, madam, that I can eat and drink in my hand while my horse is being shod! I am in haste, and must get on to Forbach to-night."

The blacksmith's wife lighted her lamp; Amante had asked her for it five minutes before. How thankful we were that she had not more speedily complied with our request! As it was, we sat in dusk shadow, pretending to stitch away, but scarcely able to see. The lamp was placed on the stove, near which my husband, for it was he, stood and warmed himself. By-and-by, he turned round, and looked all over the room, taking us in with about the same degree of interest as the inanimate furniture. Amante, cross-legged, fronting him, stooped over her work, whistling softly all the while. He turned again to the stove, impatiently rubbing his hands. He had finished his wine and galette, and wanted to be off.

"I am in haste, my good woman. Ask thy husband to get on more quickly! I will pay him double, if he makes haste."

The woman went out to do his bidding; and he once more turned round to face us. Amante went on to the next part of the tune. He took it up, whistled a second for an instant or so, and then, the blacksmith's wife re-entering, he moved towards her, as if to receive her answer the more speedily.

"One moment, monsieur—only one moment! There was a nail out of the off-foreshoe, which my husband is replacing; it would delay monsieur again, if that shoe also came off."

"Madame is right," said he, "but my haste is urgent. If madame knew my reasons, she would pardon my impatience. Once a happy husband, now a deserted and betrayed man, I pursue a wife on whom I lavished all my love, but who has abused my confidence, and fled from my house, doubtless to some paramour; carrying off with her all the jewels and money on which she could lay her hands. It is possible madame may have heard or seen something of her; she was accompanied in her flight by a base, profligate woman from Paris, whom I, unhappy man, had myself engaged for my wife's waiting-maid, little dreaming what corruption I was bringing into my house!"

"Is it possible!" said the good woman, throwing up her hands.

Amante went on whistling a little lower, out of respect to the conversation.

"However, I am tracing the wicked fugitives; I am on their track" (and the handsome, effeminate face looked as ferocious as any demon's). "They will not escape me; but every minute is a minute of misery to me, till I meet my wife. Madame has sympathy, has she not?"

He drew his face into a hard unnatural smile, and then both went out to the forge, as if once more to hasten the blacksmith over his work.

Amante stopped her whistling for one instant.

"Go on as you are, without change of an eyelid even; in a few minutes he will be gone, and it will be over!"

It was a necessary caution, for I was on the point of giving way and throwing myself weakly upon her neck. We went on, she whistling and stitching, I making semblance to sew. And it was well we did so; for almost directly he came back for his whip, which he had laid down and forgotten; and again I felt one of those sharp, quick-scanning glances sent all round the room and taking in all.

Then we heard him ride away; and then—it had been long too dark to see well—I dropped my work, and gave way to my trembling and shuddering. The blacksmith's wife returned. She was a good creature. Amante told her I was cold and weary, and she insisted on my stopping my work, and going to sit near the stove; hastening, at the same time, her preparations for supper, which, in honour of us, and of monsieur's liberal payment, was to be a little less frugal than ordinary. It was well for me that she made me taste a little of the cider-soup she was preparing, or I could not have held up, in spite of Amante's warning look, and the remembrance of her frequent exhortations to act resolutely up to the characters we had assumed, whatever befell. To cover my agitation, Amante stopped her whistling, and began to talk; and, by the time the blacksmith came in,

she and the good woman of the house were in full flow. He began at once upon the handsome gentleman, who had paid him so well; all his sympathy was with him, and both he and his wife only wished he might overtake his wicked wife, and punish her as she deserved. And then the conversation took a turn, not uncommon to those whose lives are quiet and monotonous; every one seemed to vie with each other in telling about some horror; and the savage and mysterious band of robbers called the *Chauffeurs*, who infested all the roads leading to the Rhine, with Schinderhannes at their head, furnished many a tale which made the very marrow of my bones run cold, and quenched even Amante's power of talking. Her eyes grew large and wild; her cheeks blanched; and, for once, she sought by her looks help from me. The new call upon me roused me. I rose and said, with their permission, my husband and I would seek our bed; for that we had travelled far and were early risers. I added that we would get up betimes, and finish our piece of work. The blacksmith said we should be early birds, if we rose before him; and the good-wife seconded my proposal with kindly bustle. One other such story as those they had been relating, and I do believe Amante would have fainted.

As it was, a night's rest set her up; we arose and finished our work betimes, and shared the plentiful breakfast of the family. Then we had to set forth again; only knowing that to Forbach we must not go, yet believing, as was indeed the case, that Forbach lay between us and that Germany to which we were directing our course. Two days more we wandered on, making a round, I suspect, and returning upon the road to Forbach, a league or two nearer to that town than the blacksmith's house. But as we never made inquiries I hardly knew where we were, when we came one night to a small town, with a good large, rambling inn in the very centre of the principal street. We had begun to feel as if there were more safety in towns than in the loneliness of the country. As we had parted with a ring of mine not many days before to a travelling jeweller, who was too glad to

purchase it far below its real value to make many inquiries as to how it came into the possession of a poor working tailor, such as Amante seemed to be, we resolved to stay at this inn all night, and gather such particulars and information as we could, by which to direct our onward course.

We took our supper in the darkest corner of the *salle-à-manger*, having previously bargained for a small bedroom across the court, and over the stables. We needed food sorely; but we hurried on our meal from dread of any one entering that public room who might recognise us. Just in the middle of our meal, the public diligence drove lumbering up under the *porte cochère*, and disgorged its passengers. Most of them turned into the room where we sat, cowering and fearful, for the door was opposite to the porter's lodge, and both opened on to the wide-covered entrance from the street. Among the passengers came in a young fair-haired lady, attended by an elderly French maid. The poor young creature tossed her head and shrank away from the common room, full of evil smells and promiscuous company, and demanded, in German French, to be taken to some private apartment. We heard that she and her maid had come in the coupé, and, probably from pride, poor young lady! she had avoided all association with her fellow-passengers, thereby exciting their dislike and ridicule. All these little pieces of hearsay had a significance to us afterwards, though, at the time, the only remark made that bore upon the future was Amante's whisper to me, that the young lady's hair was exactly the colour of mine, which she had cut off and burnt in the stove in the miller's kitchen, in one of her descents from our hiding-place in the loft.

As soon as we could, we struck round in the shadow, leaving the boisterous and merry fellow-passengers to their supper. We crossed the court, borrowed a lantern from the ostler, and scrambled up the rude steps to our chamber above the stable. There was no door into it; the entrance was the hole into which the ladder fitted. The window looked into the court. We were tired and soon fell asleep.

I was wakened by a noise in the stable below. One instant of listening, and I wakened Amante, placing my hand on her mouth, to prevent any exclamation in her half-roused state. We heard my husband speaking about his horse to the ostler. It was his voice. I am sure of it. Amante said so too. We durst not move to rise and satisfy ourselves. For five minutes or so he went on giving directions. Then he left the stable, and, softly stealing to our window, we saw him cross the court and re-enter the inn. We consulted as to what we should do. We feared to excite remark or suspicion by descending and leaving our chamber, or else immediate escape was our strongest idea. Then the ostler left the stable, locking the door on the outside.

"We must try and drop through the window—if indeed it is well to go at all," said Amante.

With reflection came wisdom. We should excite suspicion by leaving without paying our bill. We were on foot, and might easily be pursued. So we sat on our bed's edge, talking and shivering, while from across the court the laughter rang merrily, and the company slowly dispersed one by one, their lights flitting past the windows, as they went upstairs and settled each one to his rest.

We crept into our bed, holding each other tight, and listening to every sound, as if we were traced, and might meet our death at any moment. In the dead of night, just at the profound stillness preceding the turn into another day, we heard a soft, cautious step crossing the yard. The key into the stable was turned—some one came into the stable—we felt rather than heard him there. A horse started a little, and made a restless movement with his feet, then whinnied recognition. He who had entered made two or three low sounds to the animal, and then led him into the court. Amante sprang to the window, with the noiseless activity of a cat. She looked out, but dared not speak a word. We heard the great door into the street open—a pause for mounting, and the horse's footsteps were lost in distance.

Then Amante came back to me. "It was he! he is gone!" said she, and once more we lay down, trembling and shaking.

This time, we fell sound asleep. We slept long and late. We were wakened by many hurrying feet, and many confused voices; all the world seemed awake and astir. We rose and dressed ourselves; and, coming down, we looked around among the crowd collected in the courtyard, in order to assure ourselves *he* was not there before we left the shelter of the stable.

The instant we were seen, two or three people rushed to us.

"Have you heard?—Do you know?—That poor young lady!—oh, come and see!" And so we were hurried, almost in spite of ourselves, across the court and up the great open stairs of the main building of the inn, into a bedchamber where lay the beautiful young German lady, so full of graceful pride the night before, now white and still in death. By her stood the French maid, crying and gesticulating.

"Oh, Madame! if you had but suffered me to stay with you! Oh! the baron, what will he say!" and so she went on. Her state had but just been discovered; it had been supposed that she was fatigued, and was sleeping late, until a few minutes before. The surgeon of the town had been sent for, and the landlord of the inn was trying vainly to enforce order until he came, and, from time to time, drinking little cups of brandy, and offering them to the guests, who were all assembled there, pretty much as the servants were doing in the courtyard.

At last the surgeon came. All fell back, and hung on the words that were to fall from his lips.

"See!" said the landlord. "This lady came last night by the diligence with her maid. Doubtless a great lady, for she must have a private sitting-room"——

"She was Madame the Baroness de Rœder," said the French maid.

—"And was difficult to please in the matter of supper,

and a sleeping-room. She went to bed well, though fatigued. Her maid left her"——

"I begged," again broke in the maid, "to be allowed to sleep in her room, as we were in a strange inn, of the character of which we knew nothing; but she would not let me, my mistress was such a great lady."

—"And slept with my servants," continued the landlord. "This morning we thought madame was still slumbering; but when eight, nine, ten, and near eleven o'clock came, I bade her maid use my pass-key, and enter her room"——

"The door was not locked, only closed. And here she was found—dead, is she not, monsieur?—with her face down on her pillow, and her beautiful hair all scattered wild; she would never let me tie it up, saying it made her head ache. Such hair!" said the waiting-maid, lifting up a long golden tress, and letting it fall again.

I remembered Amante's words the night before, and crept close up to her.

Meanwhile, the doctor was examining the body underneath the bedclothes, which the landlord, until now, had not allowed to be disarranged. The surgeon drew out his hand, all bathed and stained with blood, and, holding up a short, sharp knife, with a piece of paper fastened round it.

"Here has been foul play," he said. "The deceased lady has been murdered. This dagger was aimed straight at her heart." Then, putting on his spectacles, he read the writing on the bloody paper, dimmed and horribly obscured as it was:—

"Numéro Un.
Ainsi les Chauffeurs se vengent."

"Let us go!" said I to Amante. "Oh, let us leave this horrible place!"

"Wait a little," said she. "Only a few minutes more! It will be better."

Immediately, the voices of all proclaimed their suspicions of the cavalier who had arrived last the night before. He

had, they said, made so many inquiries about the young lady whose supercilious conduct all in the *salle-à-manger* had been discussing on his entrance. They were talking about her, as we left the room; he must have come in directly afterwards, and not until he had learnt all about her had he spoken of the business which necessitated his departure at dawn of day, and made his arrangements with both landlord and ostler for the possession of the keys of the stable and *porte cochère*. In short, there was no doubt as to the murderer, even before the arrival of the legal functionary who had been sent for by the surgeon; but the word on the paper chilled every one with terror. "*Les Chauffeurs*," who were they? No one knew; some of the gang might even then be in the room overhearing, and noting down fresh objects for vengeance. In Germany, I had heard little of this terrible gang, and I had paid no greater heed to the stories related once or twice about them in Carlsruhe than one does to tales about ogres. But here, in their very haunts, I learnt the full amount of the terror they inspired. No one would be legally responsible for any evidence criminating the murderer. The public prosecutor shrank from the duties of his office. What do I say? Neither Amante nor I, knowing far more of the actual guilt of the man who had killed that poor sleeping young lady, durst breathe a word. We appeared to be wholly ignorant of everything: we, who might have told so much. But how could we? we were broken down with terrific anxiety and fatigue; with the knowledge that we, above all, were doomed victims, and that the blood, heavily dripping from the bedclothes on to the floor, was dripping thus out of the poor dead body because, when living, she had been mistaken for me.

At length, Amante went up to the landlord, and asked permission to leave his inn, doing all openly and humbly, so as to excite neither ill-will nor suspicion. Indeed, suspicion was otherwise directed, and he willingly gave us leave to depart. A few days afterwards we were across the Rhine, in Germany, making our way towards Frankfort, but still

keeping our disguises, and Amante still working at her trade.

On the way we met a young man, a wandering journeyman from Heidelberg. I knew him, although I did not choose that he should know me. I asked him, as carelessly as I could, how the old miller was now? He told me he was dead. This realisation of the worst apprehensions caused by his long silence shocked me inexpressibly. It seemed as though every prop gave way from under me. I had been talking to Amante only that very day of the safety and comfort of the home that awaited her in my father's house; of the gratitude which the old man would feel towards her; and of how there, in that peaceful dwelling, far away from the terrible land of France, she should find ease and security for all the rest of her life. All this I thought I had to promise, and even yet more had I looked for, for myself. I looked to the unburdening of my heart and conscience by telling all I knew to my best and wisest friend. I looked to his love as a sure guidance as well as a comforting stay; and, behold, he had gone away from me for ever!

I had left the room hastily on hearing of this sad news from the Heidelberger. Presently, Amante followed.

"Poor madame!" said she, consoling me to the best of her ability. And then she told me by degrees what more she had learned respecting my home, about which she knew almost as much as I did, from my frequent talks on the subject both at Les Rochers and on the dreary, doleful road we had come along. She had continued the conversation after I left, by asking about my brother and his wife. Of course, they lived on at the mill; but the man said (with what truth I know not, but I believed it firmly at the time) that Babette had completely got the upper hand of my brother, who only saw through her eyes and heard with her ears. That there had been much Heidelberg gossip of late days about her sudden intimacy with a grand French gentleman who had appeared at the mill—a relation, by marriage

—married, in fact, to the miller's sister, who, by all accounts, had behaved abominably and ungratefully. But that was no reason for Babette's extreme and sudden intimacy with him, going about everywhere with the French gentleman; and, since he left (as the Heidelberger said he knew for a fact), corresponding with him constantly. Yet her husband saw no harm in it all, seemingly; though, to be sure, he was so out of spirits, what with his father's death and the news of his sister's infamy, that he hardly knew how to hold up his head.

"Now," said Amante, "all this proves that M. de la Tourelle has suspected that you would go back to the nest in which you were reared, and that he has been there, and found that you have not yet returned; but probably he still imagines that you will do so, and has accordingly engaged your sister-in-law as a kind of informant. Madame has said that her sister-in-law bore her no extreme good-will; and the defamatory story he has got the start of us in spreading will not tend to increase the favour in which your sister-in-law holds you. No doubt the assassin was retracing his steps, when we met him near Forbach; and, having heard of the poor German lady, with her French maid and her pretty blonde complexion, he followed her. If madame will still be guided by me—and, my child, I beg of you still to trust me," said Amante, breaking out of her respectful formality into the way of talking more natural to those who had shared and escaped from common dangers; more natural, too, where the speaker was conscious of a power of protection which the other did not possess—"we will go on to Frankfort, and lose ourselves, for a time at least, in the numbers of people who throng a great town (and you have told me that Frankfort is a great town). We will still be husband and wife; we will take a small lodging; and you shall house-keep and live indoors. I, as the rougher and the more alert, will continue my father's trade, and seek work at the tailors' shops."

I could think of no better plan; so we followed this out.

In a back-street at Frankfort we found two furnished rooms to let, on a sixth storey. The one we entered had no light from day; a dingy lamp swung perpetually from the ceiling; and from that, or from the open door leading into the bed-room beyond, came our only light. The bed-room was more cheerful, but very small. Such as it was, it almost exceeded our possible means. The money from the sale of my ring was almost exhausted, and Amante was a stranger in the place, speaking only French, moreover—and the good Germans were hating the French people right heartily. However, we succeeded better than our hopes, and even laid by a little against the time of my confinement. I never stirred abroad, and saw no one, and Amante's want of knowledge of German kept her in a state of comparative isolation.

At length my child was born—my poor, worse than fatherless, child. It was a girl, as I had prayed for. I had feared lest a boy might have something of the tiger nature of its father; but a girl seemed all my own. And yet not all my own, for the faithful Amante's delight and glory in the babe almost exceeded mine; in outward show it certainly did.

We had not been able to afford any attendance beyond what a neighbouring *sage-femme* could give; and she came frequently, bringing in with her a little store of gossip, and wonderful tales culled out of her own experience, every time. One day she began to tell me about a great lady, in whose service her daughter had lived as scullion, or some such thing. Such a beautiful lady! with such a handsome husband! But grief comes to the palace as well as to the garret; and, why or wherefore no one knew, but somehow, the Baron de Rœder must have incurred the vengeance of the terrible *Chauffeurs;* for not many months ago, as madame was going to see her relations in Alsace, she was stabbed dead as she lay in bed at some hotel on the road. Had I not seen it in the *Gazette?* Had I not heard? Why, she had been told that as far off as Lyons there were placards offering a heavy reward on the part of the Baron

de Rœder for information respecting the murderer of his wife. But no one could help him; for all who could bear evidence were in such terror of the *Chauffeurs;* there were hundreds of them, she had been told, rich and poor, great gentlemen and peasants, all leagued together by most frightful oaths to hunt to the death any one who bore witness against them; so that even they who survived the tortures to which the *Chauffeurs* subjected many of the people whom they plundered dared not recognise them again—would not dare, even did they see them at the bar of a court of justice; for, if one were condemned, were there not hundreds sworn to avenge his death?

I told all this to Amante; and we began to fear that if M. de la Tourelle, or Lefebvre, or any of the gang at Les Rochers, had seen these placards, they would know that the poor lady stabbed by the former was the Baroness de Rœder, and that they would set forth again in search of me.

This fresh apprehension told on my health and impeded my recovery. We had so little money we could not call in a physician, at least not one in established practice. But Amante found out a young doctor, for whom indeed she had sometimes worked; and offering to pay him in kind, she brought him to see me, her sick wife. He was very gentle and thoughtful, though, like ourselves, very poor. But he gave much time and consideration to the case, saying once to Amante that he saw my constitution had experienced some severe shock, from which it was probable that my nerves would never entirely recover. By-and-by, I shall name this doctor; and then you will know, better than I can describe, his character.

I grew strong in time—stronger, at least. I was able to work a little at home, and to sun myself and my baby at the garret-window in the roof. It was all the air I dared to take. I constantly wore the disguise I had first set out with; as constantly had I renewed the disfiguring dye which changed my hair and complexion. But the perpetual state of terror in which I had been during the whole months succeeding my

escape from Les Rochers made me loathe the idea of ever again walking in the open daylight, exposed to the sight and recognition of every passer-by. In vain Amante reasoned—in vain the doctor urged. Docile in every other thing, in this I was obstinate. I would not stir out. One day Amante returned from her work, full of news—some of it good, some such as to cause us apprehension. The good news was this; the master for whom she worked as journeyman was going to send her with some others to a great house at the other side of Frankfort, where there were to be private theatricals, and where many new dresses and much alteration of old ones would be required. The tailors employed were all to stay at this house until the day of representation was over, as it was at some distance from the town, and no one could tell when their work would be ended. But the pay was to be proportionately good.

The other thing she had to say was this: she had that day met the travelling jeweller to whom she and I had sold my ring. It was rather a peculiar one, given to me by my husband; we had felt at the time that it might be the means of tracing us; but we were penniless and starving, and what else could we do? She had seen that this Frenchman had recognised her at the same instant that she did him; and she thought at the same time that there was a gleam of more than common intelligence on his face as he did so. This idea had been confirmed by his following her for some way on the other side of the street; but she had evaded him with her better knowledge of the town, and the increasing darkness of the night. Still it was well that she was going to such a distance from our dwelling on the next day; and she had brought me in a stock of provisions, begging me to keep within doors, with a strange kind of fearful oblivion of the fact that I had never set foot beyond the threshold of the house since I had first entered it—scarce ever ventured down the stairs. But, although my poor, my dear, very faithful Amante was like one possessed that last night, she spoke continually of the dead, which is a bad sign for the living.

She kissed you—yes! it was you, my daughter, my darling, whom I bore beneath my bosom away from the fearful castle of your father—I call him so for the first time, I must call him so once again before I have done—Amante kissed you, sweet baby! blessed little comforter! as if she never could leave off. And then she went away, alive.

Two days, three days passed away. The third evening I was sitting within my bolted doors—you asleep on your pillow by my side—when a step came up the stair, and I knew it must be for me; for ours were the topmost rooms. Some one knocked; I held my very breath. But some one spoke, and I knew it was the good Doctor Voss. Then I crept to the door, and answered.

"Are you alone?" asked I.

"Yes," said he, in a still lower voice. "Let me in." I let him in, and he was as alert as I in bolting and barring the door. Then he came and whispered to me his doleful tale. He had come from the hospital in the opposite quarter of the town, the hospital which he visited; he should have been with me sooner, but he had feared lest he should be watched. He had come from Amante's deathbed. Her fears of the jeweller were too well founded. She had left the house where she was employed that morning, to transact some errand connected with her work in the town; she must have been followed, and dogged on her way back through solitary wood-paths, for some of the wood-rangers belonging to the great house had found her lying there, stabbed to death, but not dead; with the poniard again plunged through the fatal writing—once more, but this time with the word "*un*" underlined, so as to show that the assassin was aware of his previous mistake:—

"Numéro Un.
Ainsi les Chauffeurs se vengent."

They had carried her to the house, and given her restoratives till she had recovered the feeble use of her speech. But, oh, faithful, dear friend and sister! even then

she remembered me, and refused to tell (what no one else among her fellow-workmen knew) where she lived or with whom. Life was ebbing away fast, and they had no resource but to carry her to the nearest hospital; where, of course, the fact of her sex was made known. Fortunately both for her and for me, the doctor in attendance was the very Doctor Voss whom we already knew. To him, while awaiting her confessor, she told enough to enable him to understand the position in which I was left; before the priest had heard half her tale, Amante was dead.

Doctor Voss told me he had made all sorts of *détours*, and waited thus late at night, for fear of being watched and followed. But I do not think he was. At any rate, as I afterwards learnt from him, the Baron Rœder, on hearing of the similitude of this murder with that of his wife in every particular, made such a search after the assassins, that, although they were not discovered, they were compelled to take to flight for the time.

I can hardly tell you now by what arguments Dr. Voss, at first merely my benefactor, sparing me a portion of his small modicum, at length persuaded me to become his wife. His wife he called it, I called it; for we went through the religious ceremony too much slighted at the time; and, as we were both Lutherans, and M. de la Tourelle had pretended to be of the reformed religion, a divorce from the latter would have been easily procurable by German law, both ecclesiastical and legal, could we have summoned so fearful a man into any court.

The good doctor took me and my child by stealth to his modest dwelling; and there I lived in the same deep retirement, never seeing the full light of day; although, when the dye had once passed away from my face my husband did not wish me to renew it. There was no need; my yellow hair was grey, my complexion was ashen-coloured; no creature could have recognised the fresh-coloured, bright-haired young woman of eighteen months before. The few people whom I saw knew me only as Madame Voss; a

widow much older than himself, whom Dr. Voss had secretly married. They called me the Grey Woman.

He made me give you his surname. Till now you have known no other father—while he lived, you needed no father's love. Once only, only once more, did the old terror come upon me. For some reason, which I forget, I broke through my usual custom, and went to the window of my room for some purpose, either to shut or to open it. Looking out into the street for an instant, I was fascinated by the sight of M. de la Tourelle, gay, young, elegant as ever, walking along on the opposite side of the street. The noise I had made with the window caused him to look up; he saw me, an old grey woman, and he did not recognise me! Yet it was not three years since we had parted, and his eyes were keen and dreadful, like those of the lynx.

I told M. Voss, on his return home, and he tried to cheer me; but the shock of seeing M. de la Tourelle had been too terrible for me. I was ill for long months afterwards.

Once again I saw him. Dead. He and Lefebvre were at last caught; hunted down by the Baron de Rœder in some of their crimes. Dr. Voss had heard of their arrest; their condemnation, their death; but he never said a word to me, until one day he bade me show him that I loved him by my obedience and my trust. He took me a long carriage-journey, where to I know not, for we never spoke of that day again; I was led through a prison, into a closed court-yard, where, decently draped in the last robes of death, concealing the marks of decapitation, lay M. de la Tourelle, and two or three others, whom I had known at Les Rochers.

After that conviction Dr. Voss tried to persuade me to return to a more natural mode of life, and to go out more. But although I sometimes complied with his wish, yet the old terror was ever strong upon me, and he, seeing what an effort it was, gave up urging me at last.

You know all the rest. How we both mourned bitterly the loss of that dear husband and father—for such I will

call him ever—and as such you must consider him, my child, after this one revelation is over.

Why has it been made? you ask. For this reason, my child. The lover, whom you have only known as M. Lebrun, a French artist, told me but yesterday his real name, dropped because the bloodthirsty Republicans might consider it as too aristocratic. It is Maurice de Poissy.

SIX WEEKS AT HEPPENHEIM

After I left Oxford, I determined to spend some months in travel before settling down in life. My father had left me a few thousands, the income arising from which would be enough to provide for all the necessary requirements of a lawyer's education, such as lodgings in a quiet part of London, and fees in payment to the distinguished barrister with whom I was to read; but there would be small surplus left over for luxuries or amusements; and, as I was rather in debt on leaving college, since I had forestalled my income, and the expenses of my travelling would have to be defrayed out of my capital, I determined that they should not exceed fifty pounds. As long as that sum would last me I would remain abroad; when it was spent my holiday should be over, and I would return and settle down somewhere in the neighbourhood of Russell Square, in order to be near Mr. ——'s chambers in Lincoln's Inn. I had to wait in London for one day while my passport was being made out, and I went to examine the streets in which I purposed to live; I had picked them out, from studying a map, as desirable, and so they were, if judged entirely by my reason; but their aspect was very depressing to one country-bred, and just fresh from the beautiful street-architecture of Oxford. The thought of living in such a monotonous grey district for years made me the more anxious to prolong my holiday by all the economy which could eke out my fifty pounds. I thought I could make it last for one hundred days at least. I was a good walker, and had no very luxurious tastes in the matter of accommodation or food; I had as fair a knowledge

of German and French as any untravelled Englishman can have; and I resolved to avoid expensive hotels such as my own countrymen frequented.

I have stated this much about myself, to explain how I fell in with the little story that I am going to record, but with which I had not much to do—my part in it being little more than that of a sympathising spectator. I had been through France into Switzerland, where I had gone beyond my strength in the way of walking, and I was on my way home; when one evening I came to the village of Heppenheim, on the Bergstrasse. I had strolled about the dirty town of Worms all morning, and dined in a filthy hotel; and after that I had crossed the Rhine, and walked through Lorsch to Heppenheim. I was unnaturally tired and languid, as I dragged myself up the rough-paved and irregular village street to the inn recommended to me. It was a large building with a green court before it. A cross-looking but scrupulously clean hostess received me, and showed me into a large room with a dinner-table in it, which, though it might have accommodated thirty or forty guests, only stretched down half the length of the eating-room. There were windows at each end of the room; two looked to the front of the house, on which the evening shadows had already fallen; the opposite two were partly doors, opening into a large garden full of trained fruit-trees and beds of vegetables, amongst which rose-bushes and other flowers seemed to grow by permission, not by original intention. There was a stove at each end of the room, which, I suspect, had originally been divided into two. The door by which I had entered was exactly in the middle; and opposite to it was another, leading to a great bed-chamber, which my hostess showed me as my sleeping quarters for the night.

If the place had been much less clean and inviting, I should have remained there; I was almost surprised myself at my *vis inertiæ;* once seated in the last warm rays of the slanting sun by the garden window, I was disinclined to move, or even to speak. My hostess had taken my orders

as to my evening-meal, and had left me. The sun went down, and I grew shivery. The vast room looked cold and bare; the darkness brought out shadows that perplexed me, because I could not fully make out the objects that produced them, after dazzling my eyes by gazing out into the crimson light.

Some one came in; it was the maiden to prepare for my supper. She began to lay the cloth at one end of the large table. There was a smaller one close by me. I mustered up my voice, which seemed a little as if it were getting beyond my control, and called to her—

"Will you let me have my supper here on this table?"

She came near; the light fell on her while I was in shadow. She was a tall young woman, with a fine strong figure, a pleasant face, expressive of goodness and sense, and with a good deal of comeliness about it too, although the fair complexion was bronzed and reddened by weather, so as to have lost much of its delicacy, and the features, as I had afterwards opportunity enough of observing, were anything but regular. She had white teeth, however, and well-opened blue eyes—grave-looking eyes which had shed tears for past sorrow—plenty of light-brown hair, rather elaborately plaited, and fastened up by two great silver pins. That was all—perhaps more than all—I noticed that first night. She began to lay the cloth where I had directed. A shiver passed over me; she looked at me, and then said—

"The gentleman is cold; shall I light the stove?"

Something vexed me—I am not usually so impatient; it was the coming on of serious illness—I did not like to be noticed so closely; I believed that food would restore me, and I did not want to have my meal delayed, as I feared it might be by the lighting of the stove: and most of all I was feverishly annoyed by movement. I answered sharply and abruptly—

"No; bring supper quickly; that is all I want."

Her quiet, sad eyes met mine for a moment; but I saw no change in their expression, as if I had vexed her by my

rudeness; her countenance did not for an instant lose its look of patient sense; and that is pretty nearly all I can remember of Thekla, that first evening at Heppenheim.

I suppose I ate my supper, or tried to do so, at any rate; and I must have gone to bed, for days after I became conscious of lying there, weak as a new-born babe, and with a sense of past pain in all my weary limbs. As is the case in recovering from fever, one does not care to connect facts, much less to reason upon them; so, how I came to be lying in that strange bed, in that large, half-furnished room, in what house that room was, in what town, in what country, I did not take the trouble to recall. It was of much more consequence to me then to discover what was the well-known herb that gave the scent to the clean, coarse sheets in which I lay. Gradually I extended my observations, always confining myself to the present. I must have been well-cared for by some one, and that lately too, for the window was shaded, so as to prevent the morning-sun from coming in upon the bed; and there was the crackling of fresh wood in the great white china stovè, which must have been newly replenished within a short time.

By-and-by the door opened slowly. I cannot tell why, but my impulse was to shut my eyes as if I were still asleep. But I could see through my apparently closed eyelids. In came, walking on tip-toe, with a slow care that defeated its object, two men. The first was aged from thirty to forty, in the dress of a Black-Forest peasant—old-fashioned coat and knee-breeches of strong blue cloth, but of a thoroughly good quality; he was followed by an older man, whose dress, of more pretension as to cut and colour (it was all black), was, nevertheless, as I had often the opportunity of observing afterwards, worn threadbare.

Their first sentences, in whispered German, told me who they were: the landlord of the inn where I was laying a helpless log, and the village doctor who had been called in. The latter felt my pulse, and nodded his head repeatedly in approbation. I had instinctively known that I was getting

better, and hardly cared for this confirmation; but it seemed to give the truest pleasure to the landlord, who shook the hand of the doctor in a pantomime expressive of as much thankfulness as if I had been his brother. Some low-spoken remarks were made, and then some question was asked, to which, apparently, my host was unable to reply. He left the room, and in a minute or two returned, followed by Thekla, who was questioned by the doctor, and replied with a quiet clearness, showing how carefully the details of my illness had been observed by her. Then she left the room, and, as if every minute had served to restore to my brain its power of combining facts, I was suddenly prompted to open my eyes, and ask in the best German I could muster what day of the month it was; not that I clearly remembered the date of my arrival at Heppenheim, but I knew it was about the beginning of September.

Again the doctor conveyed his sense of extreme satisfaction in a series of rapid pantomimic nods, and then replied, in deliberate but tolerable English, to my great surprise—

"It is the 29th of September, my dear sir. You must thank the dear God! Your fever has made its course of twenty-one days. Now patience and care must be practised. The good host and his household will have the care; you must have the patience. If you have relations in England, I will do my endeavours to tell them the state of your health."

"I have no near relations," said I, beginning in my weakness to cry, as I remembered, as if it had been a dream, the days when I had father, mother, sister.

"Chut, chut!" said he; then, turning to the landlord, he told him in German to make Thekla bring me one of her good bouillons; after which I was to have certain medicines, and to sleep as undisturbedly as possible. For days, he went on, I should require constant watching and careful feeding; every twenty minutes I was to have something, either wine or soup, in small quantities.

A dim notion came into my hazy mind that my previous

husbandry of my fifty pounds, by taking long walks and scanty diet, would prove in the end very bad economy; but I sank into dozing unconsciousness before I could quite follow out my idea. I was roused by the touch of a spoon on my lips; it was Thekla feeding me. Her sweet, grave face had something approaching to a mother's look of tenderness upon it, as she gave me spoonful after spoonful with gentle patience and dainty care; and then I fell asleep once more. When next I wakened, it was night; the stove was lighted, and the burning wood made a pleasant crackle, though I could only see the outlines and edges of red flame through the crevices of the small iron door. The uncurtained window on my left looked into the purple solemn night. Turning a little, I saw Thekla sitting near a table, sewing diligently at some great white piece of household work. Every now and then, she stopped to snuff the candle; sometimes she began to ply her needle again immediately; but once or twice she let her busy hands lie idly in her lap, and looked into the darkness, and thought deeply for a moment or two; these pauses always ended in a kind of sobbing sigh, the sound of which seemed to restore her to self-consciousness, and she took to her sewing even more diligently than before. Watching her had a sort of dreamy interest for me; this diligence of hers was a pleasant contrast to my repose; it seemed to enhance the flavour of my rest. I was too much of an animal just then to have my sympathy, or even my curiosity, strongly excited by her look of sad remembrance, or by her sighs.

After a while she gave a little start, looked at a watch lying by her on the table, and came, shading the candle by her hand, softly to my bedside. When she saw my open eyes, she went to a porringer placed at the top of the stove, and fed me with soup. She did not speak while doing this. I was half aware that she had done it many times since the doctor's visit, although this seemed to be the first time that I was fully awake. She passed her arm under the pillow on which my head rested, and raised me a very little; her support was as firm as a man's could have been. Again back

to her work, and I to my slumbers, without a word being exchanged.

It was broad daylight when I wakened again; I could see the sunny atmosphere of the garden outside stealing in through the nicks at the side of the shawl, hung up to darken the room—a shawl which I was sure had not been there when I had observed the window in the night. How gently my nurse must have moved about, while doing her thoughtful act!

My breakfast was brought me by the hostess; she who had received me on my first arrival at this hospitable inn. She meant to do everything kindly, I am sure; but a sick-room was not her place; by a thousand little mal-adroitnesses she fidgeted me past bearing: her shoes creaked, her dress rustled; she asked me questions about myself which it irritated me to answer; she congratulated me on being so much better, while I was faint for want of food which she delayed giving me, in order to talk. My host had more sense in him when he came in, although his shoes creaked as well as hers. By this time I was somewhat revived, and could talk a little; besides, it seemed churlish to be longer without acknowledging so much kindness received.

"I am afraid I have been a great trouble," said I. "I can only say that I am truly grateful."

His good, broad face reddened, and he moved a little uneasily.

"I don't see how I could have done otherwise than I—than we did," replied he, in the soft German of the district. "We were all glad enough to do what we could; I don't say it was a pleasure, because it is our busiest time of year—but then," said he, laughing a little awkwardly, as if he feared his expression might have been misunderstood, "I don't suppose it has been a pleasure to you either, sir, to be laid up so far from home."

"No, indeed!"

"I may as well tell you now, sir, that we had to look over your papers and clothes. In the first place, when you

were so ill I would fain have let your kinsfolk know, if I could have found a clue; and besides, you needed linen."

"I am wearing a shirt of yours, though," said I, touching my sleeve.

"Yes, sir!" said he, again reddening a little. "I told Thekla to take the finest out of the chest; but I am afraid you find it coarser than your own."

For all answer, I could only lay my weak hand on the great brown paw resting on the bed-side. He gave me a sudden squeeze in return, that I thought would have crushed my bones.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said he, misinterpreting the sudden look of pain which I could not repress; "but watching a man come out of the shadow of death into life makes one feel very friendly towards him."

"No old or true friend that I have had could have done more for me than you, and your wife, and Thekla, and the good doctor."

"I am a widower," said he, turning round the great wedding-ring that decked his third finger. "My sister keeps house for me, and takes care of the children—that is to say, she does it with the help of Thekla, the house-maiden. But I have other servants," he continued. "I am well-to-do, the good God be thanked! I have land, and cattle, and vineyards. It will soon be our vintage-time, and then you must go and see my grapes as they come into the village. I have a '*chasse*,' too, in the Odenwald; perhaps one day you will be strong enough to go and shoot the '*chevreuil*' with me."

His good, true heart was trying to make me feel like a welcome guest. Some time afterwards I learnt from the doctor that—my poor fifty pounds being nearly all expended—my host and he had been brought to believe in my poverty, as the necessary examination of my clothes and papers showed so little evidence of wealth. But I myself have but little to do with my story; I only name these things, and repeat these conversations, to show what a true, kind, honest

man my host was. By the way, I may as well call him by his name henceforward, Fritz Müller. The doctor's name, Wiedermann.

I was tired enough with this interview with Fritz Müller; but when Dr. Wiedermann came he pronounced me to be much better; and through the day much the same course was pursued as on the previous one: being fed, lying still, and sleeping, were my passive and active occupations. It was a hot, sunshiny day, and I craved for air. Fresh air does not enter into the pharmacopœia of a German doctor; but somehow I obtained my wish. During the morning-hours the window through which the sun streamed—the window looking on to the front court—was opened a little; and through it I heard the sounds of active life, which gave me pleasure and interest enough. The hen's cackle, the cock's exultant call, when he had found the treasure of a grain of corn, the movements of a tethered donkey, and the cooing and whirring of the pigeons which lighted on the window-sill, gave me just subjects enough for interest. Now and then a cart or carriage drove up—I could hear them ascending the rough village street long before they stopped at the "Halbmond," the village inn. Then there came a sound of running and haste in the house; and Thekla was always called for in sharp, imperative tones. I heard little children's footsteps, too, from time to time; and once there must have been some childish accident or hurt, for a shrill, plaintive little voice kept calling out, "*Thekla, Thekla, liebe Thekla!*" Yet, after the first early morning-hours, when my hostess attended on my wants, it was always Thekla who came to give me my food or my medicine; who redded up my room; who arranged the degree of light, shifting the temporary curtain with the shifting sun: and always as quietly and deliberately as though her attendance upon me were her sole work. Once or twice, my hostess came into the large eating-room (out of which my room opened), and called Thekla away from whatever was her occupation in my room at the time, in a sharp, injured, imperative whisper.

Once I remember it was to say that sheets were wanted for some stranger's bed, and to ask where she, the speaker, could have put the keys, in a tone of irritation, as though Thekla were responsible for Fräulein Müller's own forgetfulness.

Night came on; the sounds of daily life died away into silence; the children's voices were no more heard; the poultry were all gone to roost; the beasts of burden to their stables; and travellers were housed. Then Thekla came in softly and quietly, and took up her appointed place, after she had done all in her power for my comfort. I felt that I was in no state to be left all those weary hours which intervened between sunset and sunrise; but I did feel ashamed that this young woman, who had watched by me all the previous night, and, for aught I knew, for many nights before, and had worked hard, been run off her legs, as English servants would say, all day long, should come and take up her care of me again; and it was with a feeling of relief that I saw her head bend forwards, and finally rest on her arms, which had fallen on the white piece of sewing spread before her on the table. She slept; and I slept. When I wakened dawn was stealing into the room, and making pale the lamplight. Thekla was standing by the stove, where she had been preparing the bouillon I should require on wakening. But she did not notice my half-open eyes, although her face was turned towards the bed. She was reading a letter slowly, as if its words were familiar to her, yet as though she were trying afresh to extract some fuller or some different meaning from their construction. She folded it up softly and slowly, and replaced it in her pocket with the quiet movement habitual to her. Then she looked before her; not at me, but at vacancy filled up by memory; and, as the enchanter brought up the scenes and people which she saw, but I could not, her eyes filled with tears—tears that gathered almost imperceptibly to herself as it would seem—for when one large drop fell on her hands (held slightly together before her as she stood) she started a little, and

brushed her eyes with the back of her hand, and then came towards the bed to see if I was awake. If I had not witnessed her previous emotion, I could never have guessed that she had any hidden sorrow or pain from her manner, tranquil, self-restrained as usual. The thought of this letter haunted me, especially as more than once I, wakeful or watchful during the ensuing nights, either saw it in her hands, or suspected that she had been recurring to it, from noticing the same sorrowful, dreamy look upon her face when she thought herself unobserved. Most likely, every one has noticed how inconsistently out of proportion some ideas become, when one is shut up in any place without change of scene or thought. I really grew quite irritated about this letter. If I did not see it, I suspected it lay *perdu* in her pocket. What was in it? Of course it was a love-letter; but, if so, what was going wrong in the course of her love? I became like a spoilt child in my recovery: every one whom I saw for the time being was thinking only of me, so it was perhaps no wonder that I became my sole object of thought; and at last the gratification of my curiosity about this letter seemed to me a duty that I owed to myself. As long as my fidgety inquisitiveness remained ungratified, I felt as if I could not get well. But, to do myself justice, it was more than inquisitiveness. Thekla had tended me with the gentle, thoughtful care of a sister, in the midst of her busy life. I could often hear the Fräulein's sharp voice outside, blaming her for something that had gone wrong; but I never heard much from Thekla in reply. Her name was called in various tones by different people, more frequently than I could count, as if her services were in perpetual requisition; yet I was never neglected, or even long uncared-for. The doctor was kind and attentive; my host friendly and really generous; his sister subdued her acerbity of manner, when in my room; but Thekla was the one of all to whom I owed my comforts, if not my life. If I could do anything to smooth her path (and a little money goes a great way in these primitive parts of Germany), how

willingly would I give it! So, one night, I began—she was no longer needed to watch by my bedside, but she was arranging my room before leaving me for the night—

"Thekla," said I, "you don't belong to Heppenheim, do you?"

She looked at me, and reddened a little.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"You have been so good to me that I cannot help wanting to know more about you. I must needs feel interested in one who has been by my side through my illness as you have. Where do your friends live? Are your parents alive?"

All this time I was driving at the letter.

"I was born at Altenahr. My father is an inn-keeper there. He owns the 'Golden Stag.' My mother is dead, and he has married again, and has many children."

"And your stepmother is unkind to you?" said I, jumping to a conclusion.

"Who said so?" asked she, with a shade of indignation in her tone. "She is a right good woman, and makes my father a good wife."

"Then why are you here living so far from home?"

Now the look came back to her face which I had seen upon it during the night hours when I had watched her by stealth! a dimming of the grave frankness of her eyes, a light quiver at the corners of her mouth. But all she said was, "It was better."

Somehow, I persisted with the wilfulness of an invalid. I am half-ashamed of it now.

"But why better, Thekla? Was there"—— How should I put it? I stopped a little, and then rushed blindfold at my object: "Has not that letter which you read so often something to do with your being here?"

She fixed me with her serious eyes, till I believe I reddened far more than she; and I hastened to pour out, incoherently enough, my conviction that she had some secret care, and my desire to help her if she was in any trouble.

"You cannot help me," said she, a little softened by my explanation, though some shade of resentment at having been thus surreptitiously watched yet lingered in her manner. "It is an old story; a sorrow gone by, past; at least it ought to be, only sometimes I am foolish"—her tones were softening now—"and it is punishment enough that you have seen my folly."

"If you had a brother here, Thekla, you would let him give you his sympathy if he could not give you his help, and you would not blame yourself if you had shown him your sorrow, would you? I tell you again, let me be as a brother to you!"

"In the first place, sir"—this "sir" was to mark the distinction between me and the imaginary brother—"I should have been ashamed to have shown even a brother my sorrow, which is also my reproach and my disgrace." These were strong words, and I suppose that my face showed that I attributed to them a still stronger meaning than they warranted; but *honi soit qui mal y pense*—for she went on dropping her eyes and speaking hurriedly.

"My shame and my reproach is this: I have loved a man who has not loved me"—she grasped her hands together till the fingers made deep white dents in the rosy flesh—"and I can't make out whether he ever did, or whether he did once and is changed now; if only he did once love me, I could forgive myself."

With hasty, trembling hands she began to re-arrange the tisane and medicines for the night on the little table at my bed-side. But, having got thus far, I was determined to persevere.

"Thekla," said I, "tell me all about it, as you would to your mother, if she were alive! There are often misunderstandings which, never set to rights, make the misery and desolation of a lifetime."

She did not speak at first. Then she pulled out the letter, and said, in a quiet, hopeless tone of voice—

"You can read German writing? Read that, and see if I have any reason for misunderstanding!"

The letter was signed "Franz Weber," and dated from some small town in Switzerland—I forget what—about a month previous to the time when I read it. It began with acknowledging the receipt of some money which had evidently been requested by the writer, and for which the thanks were almost fulsome; and then, by the quietest transition in the world, he went on to consult her as to the desirability of his marrying some girl in the place from which he wrote, saying that this Anna Somebody was only eighteen, and very pretty, and her father a well-to-do shopkeeper, and adding, with coarse coxcombry, his belief that he was not indifferent to the maiden herself. He wound up by saying that, if this marriage did take place, he should certainly repay the various sums of money which Thekla had lent him at different times.

I was some time in making out all this. Thekla held the candle for me to read it; held it patiently and steadily, not speaking a word till I had folded up the letter again, and given it back to her. Then our eyes met.

"There is no misunderstanding possible, is there, sir?" asked she, with a faint smile.

"No," I replied; "but you are well rid of such a fellow."

She shook her head a little. "It shows his bad side, sir. We have all our bad sides. You must not judge him harshly; at least, I cannot. But then we were brought up together."

"At Altenahr?"

"Yes; his father kept the other inn, and our parents, instead of being rivals, were great friends. Franz is a little younger than I, and was a delicate child. I had to take him to school, and I used to be so proud of it and of my charge! Then he grew strong, and was the handsomest lad in the village. Our fathers used to sit and smoke together, and talk of our marriage; and Franz must have heard as much as I. Whenever he was in trouble, he would come to me for what advice I could give him, and he danced twice as often with me as with any other girl at all the dances,

and always brought his nosegay to me. Then his father wished him to travel, and learn the ways at the great hotels on the Rhine before he settled down in Altenahr. You know that is the custom in Germany, sir. They go from town to town as journeymen, learning something fresh everywhere, they say."

"I knew that was done in trades," I replied.

"Oh, yes; and among inn-keepers, too," she said. "Most of the waiters at the great hotels in Frankfort, and Heidelberg, and Mayence, and I dare say at all the other places, are the sons of inn-keepers in small towns, who go out into the world to learn new ways, and perhaps to pick up a little English and French; otherwise, they say, they should never get on. Franz went off from Altenahr on his journeyings four years ago next May-day, and before he went, he brought me back a ring from Bonn, where he bought his new clothes. I don't wear it now; but I have got it upstairs, and it comforts me to see something that shows me it was not all my silly fancy. I suppose he fell among bad people, for he soon began to play for money—and then he lost more than he could always pay; and sometimes I could help him a little, for we wrote to each other from time to time, as we knew each other's addresses; for the little ones grew around my father's hearth, and I thought that I, too, would go forth into the world and earn my own living, so that—well, I will tell the truth—I thought that by going into service, I could lay by enough for buying a handsome stock of household-linen, and plenty of pans and kettles against—against what will never come to pass now."

"Do the German women buy the pots and kettles, as you call them, when they are married?" asked I, awkwardly, laying hold of a trivial question, to conceal the indignant sympathy with her wrongs which I did not like to express.

"Oh, yes; the bride furnishes all that is wanted in the kitchen, and all the store of house-linen. If my mother had lived, it would have been laid by for me, as she could have afforded to buy it; but my stepmother will have hard enough

work to provide for her own four little girls. However," she continued, brightening up, "I can help her, for now I shall never marry; and my master here is just and liberal, and pays me sixty florins a year, which is high wages." (Sixty florins are about five pounds sterling.) "And now, good-night, sir. This cup to the left holds the tisane, that to the right the acorn-tea." She shaded the candle, and was leaving the room. I raised myself on my elbow, and called her back.

"Don't go on thinking about this man," said I. "He was not good enough for you. You are much better unmarried."

"Perhaps so," she answered gravely. "But you cannot do him justice; you do not know him."

A few minutes after, I heard her soft and cautious return; she had taken her shoes off, and came in her stockinged feet up to my bedside, shading the light with her hand. When she saw that my eyes were open, she laid down two letters on the table, close by my night-lamp.

"Perhaps, some time, sir, you would take the trouble to read these letters; you would then see how noble and clever Franz really is. It is I who ought to be blamed, not he."

No more was said that night.

Some time the next morning I read the letters. They were filled with vague, inflated, sentimental descriptions of his inner life and feelings; entirely egotistical, and intermixed with quotations from second-rate philosophers and poets. There was, it must be said, nothing in them offensive to good principle or good feeling, however much they might be opposed to good taste. I was to go into the next room that afternoon, for the first time of leaving my sick chamber. All the morning I lay and ruminated. From time to time I thought of Thekla and Franz Weber. She was the strong, good, helpful character, he the weak and vain; how strange it seemed that she should have cared for one so dissimilar; and then I remembered the various happy marriages, when to an outsider it seemed as if one was so inferior to the other

that their union would have appeared a subject for despair, if it had been looked at prospectively. My host came in, in the midst of these meditations, bringing a great flowered dressing-gown, lined with flannel, and the embroidered smoking-cap which he evidently considered as belonging to this Indian-looking robe. They had been his father's, he told me; and, as he helped me to dress, he went on with his communications on small family matters. His inn was flourishing; the numbers increased every year of those who came to see the church at Heppenheim—the church which was the pride of the place, but which I had never yet seen. It was built by the great Kaiser Karl. And there was the Castle of Starkenburg, too, which the Abbots of Lorsch had often defended, stalwart churchmen as they were, against the temporal power of the emperors. And Melibocus was not beyond a walk either. In fact, it was the work of one person to superintend the inn alone; but he had his farm and his vineyards beyond, which of themselves gave him enough to do. And his sister was oppressed with the perpetual calls made upon her patience and her nerves in an inn; and would rather go back and live at Worms. And his children wanted so much looking after. By the time he had placed himself in a condition for requiring my full sympathy, I had finished my slow toilette, and I had to interrupt his confidences, and accept the help of his good strong arm to lead me into the great eating-room out of which my chamber opened. I had a dreamy recollection of the vast apartment. But how pleasantly it was changed! There was the bare half of the room, it is true, looking as it had done on that first afternoon, sunless and cheerless, with the long, unoccupied table, and the necessary chairs for the possible visitors; but round the windows that opened on the garden a part of the room was enclosed by the household clothes'-horses, hung with great pieces of the blue homespun cloth of which the dress of the Black Forest peasant is made. This shut-in space was warmed by the lighted stove, as well as by the lowering rays of the October sun. There was a little round

walnut table with some flowers upon it, and a great cushioned arm-chair, placed so as to look out upon the garden and the hills beyond. I felt sure that this was all Thekla's arrangement; I had rather wondered that I had seen so little of her this day. She had come once or twice on necessary errands into my room in the morning, but had appeared to be in great haste, and had avoided meeting my eye. Even when I had returned the letters, which she had intrusted to me with so evident a purpose of placing the writer in my good opinion, she had never inquired as to how far they had answered her design; she had merely taken them with some low word of thanks, and put them hurriedly into her pocket. I suppose she shrank from remembering how fully she had given me her confidence the night before, now that daylight and actual life pressed close around her. Besides, there surely never was any one in such constant request as Thekla. I did not like this estrangement, though it was the natural consequence of my improved health, which would daily make me less and less require services which seemed so urgently claimed by others. And, moreover, after my host left me—I fear I had cut him a little short in the recapitulation of his domestic difficulties, but he was too thorough and good-hearted a man to bear malice—I wanted to be amused or interested. So I rang my little hand-bell, hoping that Thekla would answer it, when I could have fallen into conversation with her, without specifying any decided want. Instead of Thekla, the Fräulein came, and I had to invent a wish, for I could not act as a baby, and say that I wanted my nurse. However, the Fräulein was better than no one; so I asked her if I could have some grapes, which had been provided for me on every day but this, and which were especially grateful to my feverish palate. She was a good, kind woman, although, perhaps, her temper was not the best in the world; and she expressed the sincerest regret as she told me that there were no more in the house. Like an invalid, I fretted at my wish not being granted, and spoke out.

"But Thekla told me the vintage was not till the

fourteenth; and you have a vineyard close beyond the garden, on the slope of the hill out there, have you not?"

"Yes; and grapes for the gathering. But perhaps the gentleman does not know our laws. Until the vintage—the day of beginning the vintage is fixed by the Grand Duke, and advertised in the public papers—until the vintage, all owners of vineyards may only go on two appointed days in every week to gather their grapes; on those two days (Tuesdays and Fridays, this year) they must gather enough for the wants of their families; and, if they do not reckon rightly, and gather short measure, why, they have to go without. And these two last days the 'Half-Moon' has been besieged by visitors, all of whom have asked for grapes. But to-morrow the gentleman can have as many as he will; it is the day for gathering them."

"What a strange kind of paternal law!" I grumbled out. "Why is it so ordained? Is it to secure the owners against pilfering from their unfenced vineyards?"

"I am sure I cannot tell," she replied. "Country people in these villages have strange customs in many ways, as I dare say the English gentleman has perceived. If he would come to Worms, he would see a different kind of life."

"But not a view like this," I replied, caught by a sudden change of light—some cloud passing away from the sun, or something. Right outside of the windows was, as I have so often said, the garden. Trained plum-trees with golden leaves, great bushes of purple Michaelmas daisies, late-flowering roses, apple-trees, partly stripped of their rosy fruit, but still with enough left on their boughs to require the props set to support the luxuriant burden; to the left an arbour covered over with honeysuckle and other sweet-smelling creepers—all bounded by a low grey stone wall which opened out upon the steep vineyard that stretched up the hill beyond, one hill of a series rising higher and higher into the purple distance. "Why is there a rope with a bunch of straw tied in it stretched across the opening of the garden

into the vineyard?" I inquired, as my eye suddenly caught upon the object.

"It is the country way of showing that no one must pass along that path. To-morrow the gentleman will see it removed; and then he shall have the grapes. Now I will go and prepare his coffee." With a curtsey, after the fashion of Worms gentility, she withdrew. But an under-servant brought me my coffee, and with her I could not exchange a word; she spoke in such an execrable patois. I went to bed early, weary and depressed. I must have fallen asleep immediately, for I never heard any one come to arrange my bed-side table; yet in the morning I found that every usual want or wish of mine had been attended to.

I was wakened by a tap at my door, and a pretty piping child's voice asking, in broken German, to come in. On giving the usual permission, Thekla entered, carrying a great, lovely boy of two years old, or thereabouts, who had only his little night-shirt on, and was all flushed with sleep. He held tight in his hands a great cluster of noble muscatel grapes. He seemed like a little Bacchus, as she carried him towards me with an expression of pretty loving pride upon her face, as she looked at him. But, when he came close to me—the grim, wasted, unshorn—he turned quick away, and hid his face in her neck, still grasping tight his bunch of grapes. She spoke to him rapidly and softly, coaxing him, as I could tell full well, although I could not follow her words; and in a minute or two the little fellow obeyed her, and turned and stretched himself almost to overbalancing out of her arms, and half-dropped the fruit on the bed by me. Then he clutched at her again, burying his face in her kerchief, and fastening his little fists in her luxuriant hair.

"It is my master's only boy," said she, disentangling his fingers with quiet patience, only to have them grasp her braids afresh. "He is my little Max, my heart's delight; only he must not pull so hard. Say his 'to-meet-again,' and kiss his hand lovingly, and we will go." The promise of a speedy departure from my dusky room proved irresistible;

he babbled out his *Auf Wiederseh'n*, and, kissing his chubby hand, he was borne away joyful and chattering fast in his infantile half-language. I did not see Thekla again until late afternoon, when she brought me in my coffee. She was not like the same creature as the blooming, cheerful maiden whom I had seen in the morning; she looked wan and care-worn, older by several years.

"What is the matter, Thekla?" said I, with true anxiety as to what might have befallen my good, faithful nurse.

She looked round before answering. "I have seen him," she said. "He has been here, and the Fräulein has been so angry! She says she will tell my master. Oh, it has been such a day!" The poor young woman, who was usually so composed and self-restrained, was on the point of bursting into tears; but by a strong effort she checked herself, and tried to busy herself with rearranging the white china cup, so as to place it more conveniently to my hand.

"Come, Thekla," said I, "tell me all about it. I have heard loud voices talking, and I fancied something had put the Fräulein out; and Lottchen looked flurried when she brought me my dinner. Is Franz here? How has he found you out?"

"He is here. Yes, I am sure it is he; but four years makes such a difference in a man; his whole look and manner seemed so strange to me; but he knew me at once, and called me all the old names which we used to call each other when we were children; and he must needs tell me how it had come to pass that he had not married that Swiss Anna. He said he had never loved her; and that now he was going home to settle, and he hoped that I would come too, and"—— There she stopped short.

"And marry him, and live at the inn at Altenahr," said I, smiling to reassure her, though I felt rather disappointed about the whole affair.

"No," she replied. "Old Weber, his father, is dead; he died in debt, and Franz will have no money. And he was always one that needed money. Some are, you know; and,

while I was thinking, and he was standing near me, the Fräulein came in; and—and—I don't wonder—for poor Franz is not a pleasant-looking man nowadays—she was very angry, and called me a bold, bad girl, and said she could have no such goings on at the 'Halbmond,' but would tell my master when he came home from the forest."

"But you could have told her that you were old friends"—I hesitated before saying the word "lovers"; but, after a pause, out it came.

"Franz might have said so," she replied, a little stiffly. "I could not; but he went off as soon as she bade him. He went to the 'Adler' over the way, only saying he would come for my answer to-morrow morning. I think it was he that should have told her what we were—neighbour's children and early friends—not have left it all to me. Oh," said she, clasping her hands tight together, "she will make such a story of it to my master!"

"Never mind," said I; "tell the master I want to see him, as soon as he comes in from the forest, and trust me to set him right before the Fräulein has the chance to set him wrong!"

She looked up at me gratefully, and went away without any more words. Presently, the fine burly figure of my host stood at the opening to my enclosed sitting-room. He was there, three-cornered hat in hand, looking tired and heated as a man does after a hard day's work, but as kindly and genial as ever; which is not what every man is who is called to business after such a day, before he has had the necessary food and rest.

I had been reflecting a good deal on Thekla's story; I could not quite interpret her manner to-day to my full satisfaction; but yet, the love which had grown with her growth must assuredly have been called forth by her lover's sudden reappearance; and I was inclined to give him some credit for having broken off an engagement to Swiss Anna, which had promised so many worldly advantages; and, again, I had considered that, if he was a little weak and

sentimental, it was Thekla who would marry him by her own free will, and perhaps she had sense and quiet resolution enough for both. So I gave the heads of the little history I have told you to my good friend and host, adding that I should like to have a man's opinion of this man; but that, if he were not an absolute good-for-nothing, and, if Thekla still loved him, as I believed, I would try and advance them the requisite money towards establishing themselves in the hereditary inn at Altenahr.

Such was the romantic ending to Thekla's sorrows I had been planning and brooding over for the last hour. As I narrated my tale, and hinted at the possible happy conclusion that might be in store, my host's face changed. The ruddy colour faded, and his look became almost stern—certainly very grave in expression. It was so unsympathetic, that I instinctively cut my words short. When I had done, he paused a little, and then said, "You would wish me to learn all I can respecting this stranger now at the 'Adler,' and give you the impression I receive of the fellow."

"Exactly so," said I. "I want to learn all I can about him for Thekla's sake."

"For Thekla's sake I will do it," he gravely repeated.

"And come to me to-night, even if I am gone to bed?"

"Not so," he replied. "You must give me all the time you can in a matter like this."

"But he will come for Thekla's answer in the morning."

"Before he comes, you shall know all I can learn."

I was resting during the fatigues of dressing the next day, when my host tapped at my door. He looked graver and sterner than I had ever seen him do before. He sat down almost before I had begged him to do so.

"He is not worthy of her," he said. "He drinks brandy right hard; he boasts of his success at play, and"—here he set his teeth hard—"he boasts of the women who have loved him. In a village like this, sir, there are always those who spend their evenings in the gardens of the inns; and this man, after he had drank his fill, made no secrets. It needed

no spying to find out what he was; else I should not have been the one to do it."

"Thekla must be told of this," said I. "She is not the woman to love any one whom she cannot respect."

Herr Müller laughed a low, bitter laugh, quite unlike himself. Then he replied—

"As for that matter, sir, you are young; you have had no great experience of women. From what my sister tells me, there can be little doubt of Thekla's feeling towards him. She found them standing together by the window—his arm round Thekla's waist, and whispering in her ear; and, to do the maiden justice, she is not the one to suffer such familiarities from every one. No," continued he, still in the same contemptuous tone, "you'll find she will make excuses for his faults and vices; or else, which is perhaps more likely, she will not believe your story, though I who tell it you can vouch for the truth of every word I say." He turned short away and left the room. Presently I saw his stalwart figure in the hillside vineyard, before my windows, scaling the steep ascent with long, regular steps, going to the forest beyond. I was otherwise occupied than in watching his progress during the next hour. At the end of that time he re-entered my room, looking heated and slightly tired, as if he had been walking fast or labouring hard; but with the cloud off his brows, and the kindly light shining once again out of his honest eyes.

"I ask your pardon, sir," he began, "for troubling you afresh. I believe I was possessed by the devil this morning. I have been thinking it over. One has, perhaps, no right to rule for another person's happiness. To have such a"—here the honest fellow choked a little—"such a woman as Thekla to love him ought to raise any man. Besides, I am no judge for him or for her. I have found out this morning that I love her myself; and so the end of it is, that if you, sir, who are so kind as to interest yourself in the matter, and if you think it is really her heart's desire to marry this man—which ought to be his salvation both for earth and

heaven—I shall be very glad to go halves with you in any plan for setting them up in the inn at Altenahr; only allow me to see that whatever money we advance is well and legally tied up, so that it is secured to her. And be so kind as to take no notice of what I have said about my having found out that I have loved her. I named it as a kind of apology for my hard words this morning, and as a reason why I was not a fit judge of what was best." He had hurried on so that I could not have stopped his eager speaking, even had I wished to do so; but I was too much interested in the revelation of what was passing in his brave tender heart to desire to stop him. Now, however, his rapid words tripped each other up, and his speech ended in an unconscious sigh.

"But," I said, "since you were here Thekla has come to me, and we have had a long talk. She speaks now as openly to me as she would if I were her brother; with sensible frankness, where frankness is wise—with modest reticence, where confidence would be unbecoming. She came to ask me if I thought it her duty to marry this fellow, whose very appearance, changed for the worse, as she says it is, since she last saw him four years ago, seems to have repelled her."

"She could let him put his arm round her waist yesterday," said Herr Müller, with a return of his morning's surliness.

"And she would marry him now, if she could believe it to be her duty. For some reason of his own, this Franz Weber has tried to work upon this feeling of hers. He said it would be the saving of him."

"As if a man had not strength enough in him—a man who is good for aught—to save himself, but needed a woman to pull him through life!"

"Nay," I replied, hardly able to keep from smiling, "you yourself said, not five minutes ago, that her marrying him might be his salvation both for earth and heaven."

"That was when I thought she loved the fellow," he

answered quick. "Now—— but what did you say to her, sir?"

"I told her, what I believe to be as true as gospel, that, as she owned she did not love him any longer, now his real self had come to displace his remembrance, she would be sinning in marrying him—doing evil that possible good might come. I was clear myself on this point; though I should have been perplexed how to advise, if her love had still continued."

"And what answer did she make?"

"She went over the history of their lives. She was pleading against her wishes, to satisfy her conscience. She said that all along through her childhood she had been his strength; that, while under her personal influence, he had been negatively good; away from her, he had fallen into mischief"——

"Not to say vice," put in Herr Müller.

"And now he came to her penitent, in sorrow, desirous of amendment, asking her for the love she seems to have considered as tacitly plighted to him in years gone by"——

"And which he has slighted and insulted. I hope you told her of his words and conduct last night in the 'Adler' gardens?"

"No; I kept myself to the general principle, which, I am sure, is a true one. I repeated it in different forms; for the idea of the duty of self-sacrifice had taken strong possession of her fancy. Perhaps, if I had failed in setting her notion of her duty in the right aspect, I might have had recourse to the statement of facts, which would have pained her severely, but would have proved to her how little his words of penitence and promises of amendment were to be trusted to."

"And it ended?"

"Ended by her being quite convinced that she would be doing wrong instead of right, if she married a man whom she had entirely ceased to love, and that no real good could come from a course of action based on wrong-doing."

"That is right and true," he replied, his face broadening into happiness again.

"But she says she must leave your service, and go elsewhere."

"Leave my service she shall; go elsewhere she shall not."

"I cannot tell what you may have the power of inducing her to do; but she seems to me very resolute."

"Why?" said he, firing round at me, as if I had made her resolute.

"She says your sister spoke to her before the maids of the household, and before some of the townspeople, in a way that she could not stand; and that you yourself, by your manner to her last night, showed how she had lost your respect. She added, with her face of pure maidenly truth, that he had come into such close contact with her only the instant before your sister had entered the room."

"With your leave, sir," said Herr Müller, turning towards the door, "I will go and set all that right at once."

It was easier said than done. When I next saw Thekla, her eyes were swollen up with crying; but she was silent, almost defiant towards me. A look of resolute determination had settled down upon her face. I learnt afterwards that parts of my conversation with Herr Müller had been injudiciously quoted by him in the talk he had had with her. I thought I would leave her to herself, and wait till she unburdened herself of the feelings of unjust resentment towards me. But it was days before she spoke to me with anything like her former frankness. I had heard all about it from my host long before.

He had gone to her straight on leaving me; and, like a foolish, impetuous lover, had spoken out his mind and his wishes to her in the presence of his sister, who, it must be remembered, had heard no explanation of the conduct which had given her propriety so great a shock the day before. Herr Müller thought to reinstate Thekla in his sister's good opinion by giving her in the Fräulein's very

presence the highest possible mark of his own love and esteem. And there in the kitchen, where the Fräulein was deeply engaged in the hot work of making some delicate preserve on the stove, and ordering Thekla about with short, sharp displeasure in her tones, the master had come in, and, possessing himself of the maiden's hand, had, to her infinite surprise—to his sister's infinite indignation—made her the offer of his heart, his wealth, his life; had begged of her to marry him. I could gather from his account that she had been in a state of trembling discomfiture at first; she had not spoken, but had twisted her hand out of his, and had covered her face with her apron. And then the Fräulein had burst forth—"accursed words," he called her speech. Thekla had uncovered her face, to listen—to listen to the end—to the passionate recrimination between the brother and the sister. And then she had gone up close to the angry Fräulein, and had said, quite quietly, but with a manner of final determination which had evidently sunk deep into her suitor's heart, and depressed him into hopelessness, that the Fräulein had no need to disturb herself; that on this very day she had been thinking of marrying another man, and that her heart was not like a room to let, into which as one tenant went out another might enter. Nevertheless, she felt the master's goodness. He had always treated her well, from the time when she had entered the house as his servant. And she should be sorry to leave him; sorry to leave the children; very sorry to leave little Max; yes, she should even be sorry to leave the Fräulein, who was a good woman, only a little too apt to be hard on other women. But she had already been that very day and deposited her warning at the police office; the busy time would be soon over, and she should be glad to leave their service on All Saints' Day. Then (he thought) she had felt inclined to cry, for she suddenly braced herself up, and said, yes, she should be very glad; for somehow, though they had been kind to her, she had been very unhappy at Heppenheim; and she would go back to her home for a time,

and see her old father and kind step-mother, and her nursling half-sister Ida, and be among her own people again.

I could see it was this last part that most of all rankled in Herr Müller's mind. In all probability Franz Weber was making his way back to Altenahr too; and the bad suspicion would keep welling up, that some lingering feeling for her old lover and disgraced playmate was making her so resolute to leave and return to Altenahr.

For some days after this I was the confidant of the whole household, except Thekla. She, poor creature, looked miserable enough; but the hardy, defiant expression was always on her face. Lottchen spoke out freely enough; her place would not be worth having, if Thekla left; it was she who had the head for everything, the patience for everything; who stood between all the under-servants and the Fräulein's tempers. As for the children, poor motherless children! Lottchen was sure that the master did not know what he was doing when he allowed his sister to turn Thekla away—and all for what? for having a lover, as every girl had who could get one. Why, the little boy Max slept in the room which Lottchen shared with Thekla, and she heard him in the night as quickly as if she was his mother; when she had been sitting up with me, when I was so ill, Lottchen had had to attend to him, and it was weary work after a hard day to have to get up and soothe a teething child; she knew she had been cross enough sometimes; but Thekla was always good and gentle with him, however tired she was. And, as Lottchen left the room, I could hear her repeating that she thought she should leave when Thekla went; for that her place would not be worth having.

Even the Fräulein had her word of regret—regret mingled with self-justification. She thought she had been quite right in speaking to Thekla for allowing such familiarities; how was she to know that the man was an old friend and playmate? He looked like a right profligate good-for-nothing. And to have a servant take up her scolding as an unpardonable offence, and persist in quitting her place, just

when she had learnt all her work, and was so useful in the household—so useful that the Fräulein could never put up with any fresh, stupid house-maiden; but, sooner than take the trouble of teaching the new servant where everything was, and how to give out the stores if she was busy, she would go back to Worms. For, after all, house-keeping for a brother was thankless work; there was no satisfying men; and Heppenheim was but a poor ignorant village compared to Worms.

She must have spoken to her brother about her intention of leaving him and returning to her former home; indeed, a feeling of coolness had evidently grown up between the brother and sister during these latter days. When one evening Herr Müller brought in his pipe, and, as his custom had sometimes been, sat down by my stove to smoke, he looked gloomy and annoyed. I let him puff away, and take his own time. At length he began—

"I have rid the village of him at last. I could not bear to have him here, disgracing Thekla with speaking to her, whenever she went to the vineyard or the fountain. I don't believe she likes him a bit."

"No more do I," I said. He turned on me—

"Then why did she speak to him at all? Why cannot she like an honest man who likes her? Why is she so bent on going home to Altenahr?"

"She speaks to him, because she has known him from a child, and has a faithful pity for one whom she has known so innocent, and who is now so lost in all good men's regard. As for not liking an honest man (though I may have my own opinion about that), liking goes by fancy, as we say in England; and Altenahr is her home; her father's house is at Altenahr, as you know."

"I wonder if he will go there," quoth Herr Müller, after two or three more puffs. "He was fast at the 'Adler'; he could not pay his score; so he kept on staying here, saying that he should receive a letter from a friend with money in a day or two; lying in wait, too, for Thekla, who is well-known

and respected all through Heppenheim: so his being an old friend of hers made him have a kind of standing. I went in this morning and paid his score, on condition that he left the place this day; and he left the village as merrily as a cricket, caring no more for Thekla than for the Kaiser who built our church; for he never looked back at the 'Halbmond,' but went whistling down the road."

"That is a good riddance," said I.

"Yes. But my sister says she must return to Worms. And Lottchen has given notice; she says the place will not be worth having, when Thekla leaves. I wish I could give notice too."

"Try Thekla again!"

"Not I," said he, reddening. "It would seem now as if I only wanted her for a housekeeper. Besides, she avoids me at every turn, and will not even look at me. I am sure she bears me some ill-will about that ne'er-do-weel."

There was silence between us for some time, which he at length broke.

"The pastor has a good and comely daughter. Her mother is a famous housewife. They often have asked me to come to the parsonage and smoke a pipe. When the vintage is over, and I am less busy, I think I will go there and look about me."

"When is the vintage?" asked I. "I hope it will take place soon, for I am growing so well and strong that I fear I must leave you shortly; but I should like to see the vintage first."

"Oh, never fear! you must not travel yet awhile; and Government has fixed the grape-gathering to begin on the fourteenth."

"What a paternal Government! How does it know when the grapes will be ripe? Why cannot every man fix his own time for gathering his own grapes?"

"That has never been our way in Germany. There are people employed by the Government to examine the vines, and report when the grapes are ripe. It is necessary to

make laws about it; for, as you must have seen, there is nothing but the fear of the law to protect our vineyards and fruit-trees; there are no enclosures along the Bergstrasse, as you tell me you have in England; but, as people are only allowed to go into the vineyards on stated days, no one, under pretence of gathering his own produce, can stray into his neighbour's grounds and help himself, without some of the Grand Duke's foresters seeing him."

"Well," said I, "to each country its own laws."

I think it was on that very evening that Thekla came in for something. She stopped arranging the table-cloth and the flowers, as if she had something to say, yet did not know how to begin. At length I found that her sore, hot heart wanted some sympathy; her hand was against every one's, and she fancied every one had turned against her. She looked up at me, and said, a little abruptly—

"Does the gentleman know that I go on the fifteenth?"

"So soon?" said I, with surprise. "I thought you were to remain here till All Saints' Day."

"So I should have done—so I must have done—if the Fräulein had not kindly given me leave to accept of a place—a very good place, too—of housekeeper to a widow lady at Frankfort. It is just the sort of situation I have always wished for. I expect I shall be so happy and comfortable there."

"Methinks the lady doth protest too much," came into my mind. I saw she expected me to doubt the probability of her happiness, and was in a defiant mood.

"Of course," said I, "you would hardly have wished to leave Heppenheim, if you had been happy here; and every new place always promises fair, whatever its performance may be. But, wherever you go, remember you have always a friend in me!"

"Yes," she replied, "I think you are to be trusted. Though, from my experience, I should say that of very few men."

"You have been unfortunate," I answered; "many men would say the same of women."

She thought a moment, and then said, in a changed tone of voice, "The Fräulein here has been much more friendly and helpful of these late days than her brother; yet I have served him faithfully, and have cared for his little Max as though he were my own brother. But this morning he spoke to me for the first time for many days; he met me in the passage, and, suddenly stopping, he said he was glad I had met with so comfortable a place, and that I was at full liberty to go whenever I liked; and then he went quickly on, never waiting for my answer."

"And what was wrong in that? It seems to me he was trying to make you feel entirely at your ease, to do as you thought best, without regard to his own interests."

"Perhaps so. It is silly, I know," she continued, turning full on me her grave, innocent eyes; "but one's vanity suffers a little when every one is so willing to part with one."

"Thekla! I owe you a great debt—let me speak to you openly! I know that your master wanted to marry you, and that you refused him. Do not deceive yourself! You are sorry for that refusal now?"

She kept her serious look fixed upon me; but her face and throat reddened all over.

"No," she said, at length; "I am not sorry. What can you think I am made of; having loved one man ever since I was a little child until a fortnight ago, and now just as ready to love another? I know you do not rightly consider what you say, or I should take it as an insult."

"You loved an ideal man; he disappointed you, and you clung to your remembrance of him. He came, and the reality dispelled all illusions."

"I do not understand philosophy," said she. "I only know that I think that Herr Müller has lost all respect for me, from what his sister has told him; and I know that I am going away; and I trust I shall be happier in Frankfort than I have been here of late days." So saying, she left the room.

I was wakened up on the morning of the fourteenth by the merry ringing of church bells, and the perpetual firing and popping off of guns and pistols. But all this was over by the time I was up and dressed, and seated at breakfast in my partitioned room. It was a perfect October day; the dew not yet off the blades of grass, glistening on the delicate gossamer webs, which stretched from flower to flower in the garden, lying in the morning-shadow of the house. But beyond the garden, on the sunny hill-side, men, women, and children were clambering up the vineyards like ants—busy, irregular in movement, clustering together, spreading wide apart—I could hear the shrill, merry voices as I sat—and all along the valley, as far as I could see, it was much the same; for every one filled his house for the day of the vintage, that great annual festival. Lottchen, who had brought in my breakfast, was all in her Sunday best, having risen early to get her work done and go abroad to gather grapes. Bright colours seemed to abound; I could see dots of scarlet, and crimson, and orange through the fading leaves; it was not a day to languish in the house; and I was on the point of going out by myself, when Herr Müller came in to offer me his sturdy arm, to help me in walking to the vineyard. We crept through the garden, scented with late flowers and sunny fruit—we passed through the gate I had so often gazed at from the easy-chair, and were in the busy vineyard; great baskets lay on the grass already piled nearly full of purple and yellow grapes. The wine made from these was far from pleasant to my taste; for the best Rhine-wine is made from a smaller grape, growing in closer, harder clusters; but the larger and less profitable grape is by far the most picturesque in its mode of growth, and far the best to eat into the bargain. Wherever we trod, it was on fragrant, crushed vine-leaves; every one we saw had his hands and face stained with the purple juice. Presently, I sat down on a sunny bit of grass, and my host left me to go further afield, to look after the more distant vineyards. I watched his progress. After he left me, he took off coat and

waistcoat, displaying his snowy shirt and gaily-worked braces; and presently he was as busy as any one. I looked down on the village; the grey and orange and crimson roofs lay glowing in the noonday sun. I could see down into the streets; but they were all empty—even the old people came toiling up the hill-side to share in the general festivity. Lottchen had brought up cold dinners for a regiment of men; every one came and helped himself. Thekla was there, leading the little Karoline, and helping the toddling steps of Max; but she kept aloof from me; for I knew, or suspected, or had probed, too much. She alone looked sad and grave, and spoke so little, even to her friends, that it was evident to see that she was trying to wean herself finally from the place. But I could see that she had lost her short, defiant manner. What she did say was kindly and gently spoken. The Fräulein came out late in the morning, dressed, I suppose, in the latest Worms fashion—quite different to anything I had ever seen before. She came up to me, and talked very graciously to me for some time.

"Here comes the proprietor (squire) and his lady, and their dear children. See, the vintagers have tied bunches of the finest grapes on to a stick, heavier than the children, or even the lady, can carry. Look! look! how he bows!—one can tell he has been an *attaché* at Vienna. That is the Court way of bowing there—holding the hat right down before them, and bending the back at right angles. How graceful! And here is the doctor! I thought he would spare time to come up here! Well, doctor, you will go all the more cheerfully to your next patient for having been up into the vineyards. Nonsense, about grapes making other patients for you! Ah, here is the pastor and his wife, and the Fräulein Anna. Now, where is my brother, I wonder? Up in the far vineyard, I make no doubt. Herr Pastor, the view up above is far finer than what it is here, and the best grapes grow there; shall I accompany you and madame, and the dear Fräulein? The gentleman will excuse me."

I was left alone. Presently, I thought I would walk a

little farther, or at any rate change my position. I rounded a corner in the pathway; and there I found Thekla, watching by little sleeping Max. He lay on her shawl; and over his head she had made an arching canopy of broken vine-branches, so that the great leaves threw their cool, flickering shadows on his face. He was smeared all over with grape-juice; his sturdy fingers grasped a half-eaten bunch even in his sleep. Thekla was keeping Lina quiet, by teaching her how to weave a garland for her head out of field-flowers and autumn-tinted leaves. The maiden sat on the ground, with her back to the valley beyond, the child kneeling by her, watching the busy fingers with eager intentness. Both looked up as I drew near, and we exchanged a few words.

"Where is the master?" I asked. "I promised to await his return; he wished to give me his arm down the wooden steps; but I do not see him."

"He is in the higher vineyard," said Thekla quietly, but not looking round in that direction. "He will be some time there, I should think. He went with the pastor and his wife; he will have to speak to his labourers and his friends. My arm is strong, and I can leave Max in Lina's care for five minutes. If you are tired, and want to go back, let me help you down the steps; they are steep and slippery."

I had turned to look up the valley. Three or four hundred yards off, in the higher vineyard, walked the dignified pastor and his homely decorous wife. Behind came the Fräulein Anna, in her short-sleeved Sunday gown, daintily holding a parasol over her luxuriant brown hair. Close behind her came Herr Müller, stopping now to speak to his men—again, to cull out a bunch of grapes to tie on to the Fräulein's stick; and by my feet sate the proud serving-maid in her country dress, waiting for my answer, with serious, upturned eyes, and sad, composed face.

"No, I am much obliged to you, Thekla; and, if I did not feel so strong, I would have thankfully taken your arm. But I only wanted to leave a message for the master, just to say that I have gone home."

"Lina will give it to the father, when he comes down," said Thekla.

I went slowly down into the garden. The great labour of the day was over, and the younger part of the population had returned to the village, and were preparing the fireworks and pistol-shootings for the evening. Already one or two of those well-known German carts (in the shape of a V) were standing near the vineyard gates, the patient oxen meekly waiting, while basketful after basketful of grapes were being emptied into the leaf-lined receptacle.

As I sat down in my easy-chair close to the open window through which I had entered, I could see the men and women on the hill-side drawing to a centre, and all stand round the pastor, bare-headed, for a minute or so. I guessed that some words of holy thanksgiving were being said, and I wished that I had stayed to hear them, and mark my especial gratitude for having been spared to see that day. Then I heard the distant voices, the deep tones of the men, the shriller pipes of women and children, join in the German harvest-hymn, which is generally sung on such occasions;* then silence, while I concluded that a blessing was spoken by the pastor, with outstretched arms; and then they once more dispersed, some to the village, some to finish their labours for the day among the vines. I saw Thekla coming through the garden with Max in her arms, and Lina clinging to her woollen skirts. Thekla made for my open window; it was rather a shorter passage into the house than round by the door. "I may come through, may I not?" she asked

* Wir pflügen und wir streuen
Den Saamen auf das Land;
Das Wachsen und Gedeihen
Steht in des Höchsten Hand.
Er sendet Thau und Regen,
Und Sonn-und Mondenschein;
Von Ihm kommt aller Segen,
Von unserm Gott allein.
Alle gute Gabe
Kommt her von Gott dem Herrn;
Drum dankt und hofft auf Ihn!

softly. "I fear Max is not well; I cannot understand his look, and he wakened up so strange!" She paused to let me see the child's face; it was flushed almost to a crimson look of heat, and his breathing was laboured and uneasy, his eyes half-open and filmy.

"Something is wrong, I am sure," said I. "I don't know anything about children, but he is not in the least like himself."

She bent down and kissed the cheek, so tenderly that she would not have bruised the petal of a rose. "Heart's darling!" she murmured. He quivered all over at her touch, working his fingers in an unnatural kind of way, and ending with a convulsive twitching all over his body. Lina began to cry at the grave, anxious look on our faces.

"You had better call the Fräulein to look at him," said I. "I feel sure he ought to have a doctor; I should say he was going to have a fit."

"The Fräulein and the master are gone to the pastor's for coffee, and Lottchen is in the higher vineyard, taking the men their bread and beer. Could you find the kitchen-girl, or old Karl? he will be in the stables, I think. I must lose no time." Almost without waiting for my reply, she had passed through the room, and in the empty house I could hear her firm, careful footsteps going up the stair; Lina's pattering beside her; and the one voice wailing, the other speaking low comfort.

I was tired enough; but this good family had treated me too much like one of their own for me not to do what I could, in such a case as this. I made my way out into the street, for the first time since I had come to the house on that memorable evening six weeks ago. I bribed the first person I met to guide me to the doctor's, and sent him straight down to the "Halbmond", not staying to listen to the thorough scolding he fell to giving me; then, on to the parsonage, to tell the master and the Fräulein of the state of things at home.

I was sorry to be the bearer of bad news into such a

festive chamber as the pastor's. There they sat, resting after heat and fatigue, each in their best gala dress, the table spread with "Dicke Milch," potato-salad, cakes of various shapes and kinds—all the dainty cates dear to the German palate. The pastor was talking to Herr Müller, who stood near the pretty young Fräulein Anna, in her fresh white chemisette, with her round white arms, and her youthful coquettish airs, as she prepared to pour out the coffee; our Fräulein was talking busily to the Frau Mama; the younger boys and girls of the family filling up the room. A ghost would have startled the assembled party less than I did, and would probably have been more welcome, considering the news I brought. As he listened, the master caught up his hat and went forth, without apology or farewell. Our Fräulein made up for both, and questioned me fully; but now she, I could see, was in haste to go, although restrained by her manners, and the kind-hearted Frau Pastorin soon set her at liberty to follow her inclination. As for me, I was dead beat, and only too glad to avail myself of the hospitable couple's pressing request, that I would stop and share their meal. Other magnates of the village came in presently, and relieved me of the strain of keeping up a German conversation about nothing at all with entire strangers. The pretty Fräulein's face had clouded over a little at Herr Müller's sudden departure; but she was soon as bright as could be, giving private chase and sudden little scoldings to her brothers, as they made raids upon the dainties under her charge. After I was duly rested and refreshed, I took my leave; for I, too, had my quieter anxieties about the sorrow in the Müller family.

The only person I could see at the "Halbmond" was Lottchen; every one else was busy about the poor little Max, who was passing from one fit into another. I told Lottchen to ask the doctor to come in and see me before he took his leave for the night; and, tired as I was, I kept up till after his visit, though it was very late before he came; I could see from his face how anxious he was. He would

give me no opinion as to the child's chances of recovery; from which I guessed that he had not much hope. But, when I expressed my fear, he cut me very short.

"The truth is, you know nothing about it; no more do I, for that matter. It is enough to try any man, much less a father, to hear his perpetual moans—not that he is conscious of pain, poor little worm; but, if she stops for a moment in her perpetual carrying him backwards and forwards, he plains so piteously it is enough to—enough to make a man bless the Lord, who never led him into the pit of matrimony. To see the father up there, following her as she walks up and down the room, the child's head over her shoulder, and Müller trying to make the heavy eyes recognise the old familiar ways of play, and the chirruping sounds which he can scarce make for crying! I shall be here to-morrow early, though, before that, either life or death will have come without the old doctor's help."

All night long I dreamt my feverish dream—of the vineyard—the carts, which held little coffins instead of baskets of grapes—of the pastor's daughter, who would pull the dying child out of Thekla's arms; it was a bad, weary night! I slept long into the morning; the broad daylight filled my room; and yet no one had been near to waken me! Did that mean life or death? I got up and dressed as fast as I could; for I was aching all over with the fatigue of the day before. Out into the sitting-room; the table was laid for breakfast, but no one was there. I passed into the house beyond, up the stairs, blindly seeking for the room where I might know whether it was life or death. At the door of a room I found Lottchen crying; at the sight of me in that unwonted place she started, and began some kind of apology, broken both by tears and smiles, as she told me that the doctor said the danger was over—past, and that Max was sleeping a gentle peaceful slumber in Thekla's arms—arms that had held him all through the livelong night.

"Look at him, sir; only go in softly; it is a pleasure to see the child to-day; tread softly, sir!"

She opened the chamber-door. I could see Thekla sitting, propped up by cushions and stools, holding her heavy burden, and bending over him with a look of tenderest love. Not far off stood the Fräulein, all disordered and tearful, stirring or seasoning some hot soup, while the master stood by her, impatient. As soon as it was cooled or seasoned enough, he took the basin and went to Thekla, and said something very low ; she lifted up her head, and I could see her face ; pale, weary with watching, but with a soft, peaceful look upon it, which it had not worn for weeks. Fritz Müller began to feed her, for her hands were occupied in holding his child; I could not help remembering Mrs. Inchbald's pretty description of Dorriforth's anxiety in feeding Miss Milner; she compares it, if I remember rightly, to that of a tender-hearted boy, caring for his darling bird, the loss of which would embitter all the joys of his holidays. We closed the door without noise, so as not to waken the sleeping child. Lottchen brought me my coffee and bread ; she was ready either to laugh or to weep on the slightest occasion. I could not tell if it was in innocence or in mischief that she asked me the following question—

"Do you think Thekla will leave to-day, sir?"

In the afternoon I heard Thekla's step behind my extemporary screen. I knew it quite well. She stopped for a moment, before emerging into my view.

She was trying to look as composed as usual; but, perhaps because her steady nerves had been shaken by her night's watching, she could not help faint touches of dimples at the corners of her mouth, and her eyes were veiled from any inquisitive look by their drooping lids.

"I thought you would like to know that the doctor says Max is quite out of danger now. He will only require care."

"Thank you, Thekla; Doctor —— has been in already this afternoon to tell me so, and I am truly glad."

She went to the window, and looked out for a moment. Many people were in the vineyards again to-day; although

we, in our household anxiety, had paid them but little heed. Suddenly, she turned round into the room, and I saw that her face was crimson with blushes. In another instant Herr Müller entered by the window.

"Has she told you, sir?" said he, possessing himself of her hand, and looking all a-glow with happiness. "Hast thou told our good friend?" addressing her.

"No. I was going to tell him, but I did not know how to begin."

"Then I will prompt thee. Say after me—'I have been a wilful, foolish woman'"——

She wrenched her hand out of his, half-laughing—"I am a foolish woman, for I have promised to marry him. But he is a still more foolish man, for he wishes to marry me. That is what I say."

"And I have sent Babette to Frankfort with the pastor. He is going there, and will explain all to Frau von Schmidt; and Babette will serve her for a time. When Max is well enough to have the change of air the doctor prescribes for him, thou shalt take him to Altenahr; and thither will I also go, and become known to thy people and thy father. And before Christmas the gentleman here shall dance at our wedding."

"I must go home to England, dear friends, before many days are over. Perhaps we may travel together as far as Remagen. Another year I will come back to Heppenheim and see you."

As I planned it, so it was. We left Heppenheim all together on a lovely All-Saints' day. The day before—the day of All-Souls—I had watched Fritz and Thekla lead little Lina up to the Acre of God, the Field of Rest, to hang the wreath of immortelles on her mother's grave. Peace be with the dead and the living!

A DARK NIGHT'S WORK

CHAPTER I

In the county town of a certain shire there lived (about forty years ago) one Mr. Wilkins, a conveyancing attorney of considerable standing.

The certain shire was but a small county, and the principal town in it contained only about four thousand inhabitants; so, in saying that Mr. Wilkins was the principal lawyer in Hamley, I say very little, unless I add that he transacted all the legal business of the gentry for twenty miles round. His grandfather had established the connection; his father had consolidated and strengthened it, and, indeed, by his wise and upright conduct, as well as by his professional skill, had obtained for himself the position of confidential friend to many of the surrounding families of distinction. He visited among them in a way which no mere lawyer had ever done before; dined at their tables—he alone, not accompanied by his wife, be it observed; rode to the meet occasionally, as if by accident, although he was as well mounted as any squire among them, and was often persuaded (after a little coquetting about "professional engagements," and "being wanted at the office") to have a run with his clients; nay, once or twice he forgot his usual caution, was first in at the death, and rode home with the brush. But in general he knew his place—as his place was held to be in that aristocratic county, and in those days. Nor let it be supposed that he was in any way a toad-eater. He respected himself too much for that. He would give the most unpalatable advice, if need

were; would counsel an unsparing reduction of expenditure to an extravagant man; would recommend such an abatement of family pride as paved the way for one or two happy marriages in some instances; nay, what was the most likely piece of conduct of all to give offence forty years ago, he would speak up for an unjustly-used tenant; and that with so much temperate and well-timed wisdom and good feeling, that he more than once gained his point. He had one son, Edward. This boy was the secret joy and pride of his father's heart. For himself he was not in the least ambitious, but it did cost him a hard struggle to acknowledge that his own business was too lucrative, and brought in too large an income, to pass away into the hands of a stranger, as it would do if he indulged his ambition for his son by giving him a college education and making him into a barrister. This determination on the more prudent side of the argument took place while Edward was at Eton. The lad had, perhaps, the largest allowance of pocket-money of any boy at the school; and he had always looked forward to going to Christ Church along with his fellows, the sons of the squires, his father's employers. It was a severe mortification to him to find that his destiny was changed, and that he had to return to Hamley to be articled to his father, and to assume the hereditary subservient position to lads whom he had licked in the playground, and beaten at learning.

His father tried to compensate him for the disappointment by every indulgence which money could purchase. Edward's horses were even finer than those of his father; his literary tastes were kept up and fostered by his father's permission to form an extensive library, for which purpose a noble room was added to Mr. Wilkins's already extensive house in the suburbs of Hamley. And after his year of legal study in London his father sent him to make the grand tour, with something very like *carte blanche* as to expenditure, to judge from the packages which were sent home from various parts of the Continent.

At last he came home—came back to settle as his father's

partner at Hamley. He was a son to be proud of, and right down proud was old Mr. Wilkins of his handsome, accomplished, gentlemanly lad. For Edward was not one to be spoilt by the course of indulgence he had passed through; at least, if it had done him an injury, the effects were at present hidden from view. He had no vulgar vices; he was, indeed, rather too refined for the society he was likely to be thrown into, even supposing that society to consist of the highest of his father's employers. He was well-read, and an artist of no mean pretensions. Above all, "his heart was in the right place", as his father used to observe. Nothing could exceed the deference he always showed to him. His mother had long been dead.

I do not know whether it was Edward's own ambition or his proud father's wishes that had led him to attend the Hamley assemblies. I should conjecture the latter, for Edward had of himself too much good taste to wish to intrude into any society. In the opinion of all the shire, no society had more reason to consider itself select than that which met at every full-moon in the Hamley assembly-room, an excrescence built on to the principal inn in the town by the joint subscription of all the county-families. Into those choice and mysterious precincts no town's person was ever allowed to enter; no professional man might set his foot therein; no infantry officer saw the interior of that ball or that card room. The old original subscribers would fain have had a man prove his sixteen quarterings before he might make his bow to the queen of the night; but the old original founders of the Hamley assemblies were dropping off; minuets had vanished with them, country dances had died away, quadrilles were in high vogue—nay, one or two of the high magnates of ——shire were trying to introduce waltzing (as they had seen it in London, where it had come in with the visit of the Allied sovereigns), when Edward Wilkins made his *début* on these boards. He had been at many splendid assemblies abroad; but still the little old ball-room attached to the George Inn in his native town was to him a place grander

and more awful than the most magnificent saloons he had seen in Paris or Rome. He laughed at himself for this unreasonable feeling of awe; but there it was, notwithstanding. He had been dining at the house of one of the lesser gentry, who was under considerable obligations to his father, and who was the parent of eight "muckle-moo'd" daughters, so hardly likely to oppose much aristocratic resistance to the elder Mr. Wilkins's clearly implied wish that Edward should be presented at the Hamley assembly-rooms. But many a squire glowered and looked black at the introduction of Wilkins the attorney's son into the sacred precincts; and perhaps there would have been much more mortification than pleasure in this assembly to the young man, had it not been for an incident that occurred pretty late in the evening. The lord-lieutenant of the county usually came with a large party to the Hamley assemblies once in a season; and this night he was expected, and with him a fashionable duchess and her daughters. But time wore on, and they did not make their appearance. At last there was a rustling and a bustling, and in sailed the superb party. For a few minutes dancing was stopped; the earl led the duchess to a sofa; some of their acquaintances came up to speak to them; and then the quadrilles were finished in rather a flat manner. A country dance followed, in which none of the lord-lieutenant's party joined; then there was a consultation, a request, an inspection of the dancers, a message to the orchestra, and the band struck up a waltz; the duchess's daughters flew off to the music, and some more young ladies seemed ready to follow; but, alas! there was a lack of gentlemen acquainted with the new-fashioned dance. One of the stewards bethought him of young Wilkins, only just returned from the Continent. Edward was a beautiful dancer, and waltzed to admiration. For his next partner he had one of the Lady ——s; for the duchess, to whom the ——shire squires and their little county politics and contempts were alike unknown, saw no reason why her lovely Lady Sophy should not have a good partner, whatever his pedigree might

be, and begged the stewards to introduce Mr. Wilkins to her. After this night, his fortune was made with the young ladies of the Hamley assemblies. He was not unpopular with the mammas; but the heavy squires still looked at him askance, and the heirs (whom he had licked at Eton) called him an upstart behind his back.

CHAPTER II

It was not a satisfactory situation. Mr. Wilkins had given his son an education and tastes beyond his position. He could not associate with either profit or pleasure with the doctor or the brewer of Hamley; the vicar was old and deaf, the curate a raw young man, half-frightened at the sound of his own voice. Then, as to matrimony—for the idea of his marriage was hardly more present in Edward's mind than in that of his father—he could scarcely fancy bringing home any one of the young ladies of Hamley to the elegant mansion, so full of suggestion and association to an educated person, so inappropriate a dwelling for an ignorant, uncouth, ill-brought-up girl. Yet Edward was fully aware, if his fond father was not, that of all the young ladies who were glad enough of him as a partner at the Hamley assemblies, there was not one of them but would have considered herself affronted by an offer of marriage from an attorney, the son and grandson of attorneys. The young man had perhaps received many a slight and mortification pretty quietly during these years, which yet told upon his character in after life. Even at this very time they were having their effect. He was of too sweet a disposition to show resentment, as many men would have done. But nevertheless he took a secret pleasure in the power which his father's money gave him. He would buy an expensive horse after five minutes' conversation as to the price, about which a needy heir of one

of the proud county-families had been haggling for three weeks. His dogs were from the best kennels in England, no matter at what cost; his guns were of the newest and most improved make; and all these were expenses on objects which were among those of daily envy to the squires and squires' sons around. They did not much care for the treasures of art, which report said were being accumulated in Mr. Wilkins's house. But they did covet the horses and hounds he possessed; and the young man knew that they coveted, and rejoiced in it.

By-and-by, he formed a marriage, which went as near as marriages ever do towards pleasing everybody. He was desperately in love with Miss Lamotte, so he was delighted when she consented to be his wife. His father was delighted in his delight, and, besides, was charmed to remember that Miss Lamotte's mother had been Sir Frank Holster's younger sister, and that, although her marriage had been disowned by her family, as beneath her in rank, yet no one could efface her name out of the Baronetage, where Lettice, youngest daughter of Sir Mark Holster, born 1772, married H. Lamotte, 1799, died 1810, was duly chronicled. She had left two children, a boy and a girl, of whom their uncle, Sir Frank, took charge, as their father was worse than dead—an outlaw whose name was never mentioned. Mark Lamotte was in the army; Lettice had a dependent position in her uncle's family: not intentionally made more dependent than was rendered necessary by circumstances, but still dependent enough to grate on the feelings of a sensitive girl, whose natural susceptibility to slights was redoubled by the constant recollection of her father's disgrace. As Mr. Wilkins well knew, Sir Frank was considerably involved; but it was with very mixed feelings that he listened to the suit which would provide his penniless niece with a comfortable, not to say luxurious, home, and with a handsome, accomplished young man, of unblemished character, for a husband. He said one or two bitter and insolent things to Mr. Wilkins, even while he was giving his consent to the match; that

was his temper, his proud, evil temper; but he was really and permanently satisfied with the connection, though he would occasionally turn round on his nephew-in-law, and sting him with a covert insult as to his want of birth, and the inferior position which he held; forgetting, apparently, that his own brother-in-law and Lettice's father might be at any moment brought to the bar of justice, if he attempted to re-enter his native country.

Edward was annoyed at all this; Lettice resented it. She loved her husband dearly, and was proud of him; for she had discernment enough to see how superior he was in every way to her cousins, the young Holsters, who borrowed his horses, drank his wines, and yet had caught their father's habit of sneering at his profession. Lettice wished that Edward would content himself with a purely domestic life, would let himself drop out of the company of the ——shire squirearchy, and find his relaxation with her, in their luxurious library, or lovely drawing-room, so full of white, gleaming statues and gems of pictures. But, perhaps, this was too much to expect of any man, especially of one who felt himself fitted in many ways to shine in society, and who was sociable by nature. Sociability in that county at that time meant conviviality. Edward did not care for wine, and yet he was obliged to drink—and, by-and-by, he grew to pique himself on his character as a judge of wine. His father by this time was dead; dead, happy old man, with a contented heart—his affairs flourishing, his poorer neighbours loving him, his richer respecting him, his son and daughter-in-law the most affectionate and devoted that ever man had, and his healthy conscience at peace with his God.

Lettice could have lived to herself and her husband and children. Edward daily required more and more the stimulus of society. His wife wondered how he could care to accept dinner invitations from people who treated him as "Wilkins the attorney, a very good sort of fellow," as they introduced him to strangers who might be staying in the country, but who had no power to appreciate the taste, the talents, the

impulsive artistic nature, which she held so dear. She forgot that by accepting such invitations Edward was occasionally brought into contact with people not merely of high conventional, but of high intellectual rank; that, when a certain amount of wine had dissipated his sense of inferiority of rank and position, he was a brilliant talker, a man to be listened to and admired even by wandering London statesmen, professional diners-out, or any great authors who might find themselves visitors in a ——shire country-house. What she would have had him share from the pride of her heart, she should have warned him to avoid from the temptations to sinful extravagance which it led him into. He had begun to spend more than he ought, not in intellectual—though that would have been wrong—but in purely material things. His wines, his table, should be such as no squire's purse or palate could command. His dinner-parties—small in number, the viands rare and delicate in quality, and sent up to table by an Italian cook—should be such as even the London stars should notice with admiration. He would have Lettice dressed in the richest materials, the most delicate lace; jewellery, he said, was beyond their means; glancing with proud humility at the diamonds of the elder ladies, and the alloyed gold of the younger. But he managed to spend as much on his wife's lace as would have bought many a set of inferior jewellery. Lettice well became it all. If, as people said, her father had been nothing but a French adventurer, she bore traces of her nature in her grace, her delicacy, her fascinating and elegant ways of doing all things. She was made for society; and yet she hated it. And, one day, she went out of it altogether and for evermore. She had been well in the morning, when Edward went down to his office in Hamley. At noon he was sent for by hurried trembling messengers. When he got home, breathless and uncomprehending, she was past speech. One glance from her lovely, loving black eyes showed that she recognised him with the passionate yearning that had been one of the characteristics of her love through life. There was no word

passed between them. He could not speak, any more than could she. He knelt down by her. She was dying; she was dead; and he knelt on immovable. They brought him his eldest child, Ellinor, in utter despair what to do in order to rouse him. They had no thought as to the effect on her, hitherto shut up in the nursery during this busy day of confusion and alarm. The child had no idea of death; and her father, kneeling and tearless, was far less an object of surprise or interest to her than her mother, lying still and white, and not turning her head to smile at her darling.

"Mamma! mamma!" cried the child, in shapeless terror. But the mother never stirred; and the father hid his face yet deeper in the bedclothes, to stifle a cry as if a sharp knife had pierced his heart. The child forced her impetuous way from her attendants, and rushed to the bed. Undeterred by deadly cold or stony immobility, she kissed the lips and stroked the glossy raven hair, murmuring sweet words of wild love, such as had passed between the mother and child, often and often, when no witnesses were by, and altogether seemed so nearly beside herself in an agony of love and terror, that Edward arose and, softly taking her in his arms, bore her away, lying back like one dead (so exhausted was she by the terrible emotion they had forced on her childish heart), into his study, a little room opening out of the grand library; where on happy evenings, never to come again, he and his wife were wont to retire to have coffee together, and then perhaps stroll out of the glass door into the open air, the shrubbery, the fields—never more to be trodden by those dear feet. What passed between father and child in this seclusion, none could tell. Late in the evening, Ellinor's supper was sent for, and the servant who brought it in saw the child lying as one dead in her father's arms and, before he left the room, watched his master feeding her, the girl of six years of age, with as tender care as if she had been a baby of six months.

CHAPTER III

From that time, the tie between father and daughter grew very strong and tender indeed. Ellinor, it is true, divided her affection between her baby sister and her papa; but he, caring little for babies, had only a theoretic regard for his younger child, while the elder absorbed all his love. Every day that he dined at home Ellinor was placed opposite to him, while he ate his late dinner; she sat where her mother had done during the meal, although she had dined and even supped some time before on the more primitive nursery fare. It was half pitiful, half amusing, to see the little girl's grave, thoughtful ways and modes of speech, as if trying to act up to the dignity of her place as her father's companion, till sometimes the little head nodded off to slumber in the middle of lisping some wise little speech. "Old-fashioned," the nurses called her, and prophesied that she would not live long, in consequence of her old-fashionedness. But, instead of the fulfilment of this prophecy, the fat, bright baby was seized with fits, and was well, ill, and dead in a day! Ellinor's grief was something alarming, from its quietness and concealment. She waited till she was left—as she thought—alone at nights, and then sobbed and cried her passionate cry for "Baby, baby, come back to me—come back"; till every one feared for the health of the frail little girl, whose childish affections had had to stand two such shocks. Her father put aside all business, all pleasure of every kind, to win his darling from her grief. No mother could have done more, no tenderest nurse done half so much as Mr. Wilkins then did for Ellinor.

If it had not been for him, she would have just died of her grief. As it was, she overcame it—but slowly, wearily—hardly letting herself love any one for some time, as if she instinctively feared lest all her strong attachments should find a sudden end in death. Her love—thus dammed up

into a small space—at last burst its banks, and overflowed on her father. It was a rich reward to him for all his care of her, and he took delight—perhaps a selfish delight—in all the many pretty ways she perpetually found of convincing him, if he had needed conviction, that he was ever the first object with her. The nurse told him that, half-an-hour or so before the earliest time at which he could be expected home in the evenings, Miss Ellinor began to fold up her doll's things and lull the inanimate treasure to sleep. Then she would sit and listen with an intensity of attention for his footstep. Once the nurse had expressed some wonder at the distance at which Ellinor could hear her father's approach, saying that she had listened and could not hear a sound, to which Ellinor had replied—

"Of course you cannot; he is not your papa!"

Then, when he went away in the morning, after he had kissed her, Ellinor would run to a certain window from which she could watch him up the lane, now hidden behind a hedge, now reappearing through an open space, again out of sight, till he reached a great old beech-tree, where for an instant more she saw him. And then she would turn away with a sigh, sometimes reassuring her unspoken fears by saying softly to herself—

"He will come again to-night."

Mr. Wilkins liked to feel his child dependent on him for all her pleasures. He was even a little jealous of any one who devised a treat or conferred a present, the first news of which did not come from or through him.

At last it was necessary that Ellinor should have some more instruction than her good old nurse could give. Her father did not care to take upon himself the office of teacher, which he thought he foresaw would necessitate occasional blame, an occasional exercise of authority, which might possibly render him less idolised by his little girl; so he commissioned Lady Holster to choose out one among her many *protégées* as a governess for his daughter. Now, Lady Holster, who kept a sort of amateur county register-office,

was only too glad to be made of use in this way; but, when she inquired a little further as to the sort of person required, all she could extract from Mr. Wilkins was—

"You know the kind of education a lady should have, and will, I am sure, choose a governess for Ellinor better than I could direct you. Only, please, choose some one who will not marry me, and who will let Ellinor go on making my tea, and doing pretty much what she likes; for she is so good they need not try to make her better, only to teach her what a lady should know."

Miss Monro was selected—a plain, intelligent, quiet woman of forty—and it was difficult to decide whether she or Mr. Wilkins took the most pains to avoid each other, acting, with regard to Ellinor, pretty much like the famous Adam and Eve in the weather-glass: when the one came out, the other went in. Miss Monro had been tossed about and overworked quite enough in her life not to value the privilege and indulgence of her evenings to herself, her comfortable schoolroom, her quiet cosy teas, her book, or her letter-writing afterwards. By mutual agreement she did not interfere with Ellinor and her ways and occupations on the evenings when the girl had not her father for companion; and these occasions became more and more frequent as years passed on, and the deep shadow was lightened which the sudden death that had visited his household had cast over him. As I have said before, he was always a popular man at dinner-parties. His amount of intelligence and accomplishment was rare in ——shire; and, if it required more wine than formerly to bring his conversation up to the desired point of range and brilliancy, wine was not an article spared or grudged at the county dinner-tables. Occasionally his business took him up to London. Hurried as these journeys might be, he never returned without a new game, a new toy of some kind, to "make home pleasant to his little maid", as he expressed himself.

He liked, too, to see what was doing in art, or in literature; and, as he gave pretty extensive orders for anything

he admired, he was almost sure to be followed down to Hamley by one or two packages or parcels, the arrival and opening of which began soon to form the pleasant epochs in Ellinor's grave though happy life.

The only person of his own standing with whom Mr. Wilkins kept up any intercourse in Hamley was the new clergyman, a bachelor about his own age, a learned man, a fellow of his college, whose first claim on Mr. Wilkins's attention was the fact that he had been travelling-bachelor for his university, and had consequently been on the Continent about the very same two years that Mr. Wilkins had been there; and, although they had never met, yet they had many common acquaintances and common recollections to talk over of this period, which, after all, had been about the most bright and hopeful of Mr. Wilkins's life.

Mr. Ness had an occasional pupil; that is to say, he never put himself out of the way to obtain pupils, but did not refuse the entreaties sometimes made him that he would prepare a young man for college, by allowing the said young man to reside and read with him. "Ness's men" took rather high honours; for the tutor, too indolent to find out work for himself, had a certain pride in doing well the work that was found for him.

When Ellinor was somewhere about fourteen, a young Mr. Corbet came to be pupil to Mr. Ness. Her father always called on the young men reading with the clergyman, and asked them to his house. His hospitality had in course of time lost its *recherché* and elegant character, but was always generous, and often profuse. Besides, it was in his character to like the joyous, thoughtless company of the young better than that of the old—given the same amount of refinement and education in both.

Mr. Corbet was a young man of very good family, from a distant county. If his character had not been so grave and deliberate, his years would only have entitled him to be called a boy, for he was but eighteen at the time when he came to read with Mr. Ness. But many men of five-and-

twenty have not reflected so deeply as this young Mr. Corbet already had. He had considered, and almost matured, his plan for life; had ascertained what objects he desired most to accomplish in the dim future, which is to many at his age only a shapeless mist; and had resolved on certain steady courses of action by which such objects were most likely to be secured. A younger son, his family connections and family interest pre-arranged a legal career for him; and it was in accordance with his own tastes and talents. All, however, which his father hoped for him was, that he might be able to make an income sufficient for a gentleman to live on. Old Mr. Corbet was hardly to be called ambitious; or, if he were, his ambition was limited to views for the eldest son. But Ralph intended to be a distinguished lawyer, not so much for the vision of the woolsack, which I suppose dances before the imagination of every young lawyer, as for the grand intellectual exercise, and the consequent power over mankind, that distinguished lawyers may always possess if they choose. A seat in Parliament, statesmanship, and all the great scope for a powerful and active mind that lay on each side of such a career—these were the objects which Ralph Corbet set before himself. To take high honours at college was the first step to be accomplished; and, in order to achieve this Ralph had—not persuaded, persuasion was a weak instrument which he despised, but gravely reasoned his father into consenting to pay the large sum which Mr. Ness expected with a pupil. The good-natured old squire was rather pressed for ready money; but, sooner than listen to an argument instead of taking his nap after dinner, he would have yielded anything. But this did not satisfy Ralph; his father's reason must be convinced of the desirability of the step, as well as his weak will give way. The squire listened, looked wise, sighed; spoke of Edward's extravagance and the girls' expenses, grew sleepy, and said, "Very true," "That is but reasonable, certainly," glanced at the door, and wondered when his son would have ended his talking and go into the drawing-room; and at length found himself

writing the desired letter to Mr. Ness, consenting to everything, terms and all. Mr. Ness never had a more satisfactory pupil, nor one whom he could treat more as an intellectual equal.

Mr. Corbet, as Ralph was always called in Hamley, was resolute in his cultivation of himself, even exceeding what his tutor demanded of him. He was greedy of information in the hours not devoted to absolute study. Mr. Ness enjoyed giving information, but most of all he liked the hard, tough arguments on all metaphysical and ethical questions in which Mr. Corbet delighted to engage him. They lived together on terms of happy equality, having thus much in common. They were essentially different, however, although there were so many points of resemblance. Mr. Ness was unworldly, as far as the idea of real unworldliness is compatible with a turn for self-indulgence and indolence; while Mr. Corbet was deeply, radically worldly, yet for the accomplishment of his object could deny himself all the careless pleasures natural to his age. The tutor and pupil allowed themselves one frequent relaxation, that of Mr. Wilkins's company. Mr. Ness would stroll to the office after the six hours' hard reading were over—leaving Mr. Corbet still bent over the table, book-bestrewn—and see what Mr. Wilkins's engagements were. If he had nothing better to do that evening, he was either asked to dine at the parsonage, or he, in his careless hospitable way, invited the other two to dine with him, Ellinor forming the fourth at table, as far as seats went, although her dinner had been eaten early with Miss Monro. She was little and slight of her age, and her father never seemed to understand how she was passing out of childhood. Yet, while in stature she was like a child, in intellect, in force of character, in strength of clinging affection, she was a woman. There might be much of the simplicity of a child about her—there was little of the undeveloped girl, varying from day to day like an April sky, careless as to which way her own character is tending. So the two young people sat with their elders, and both relished the company

they were thus prematurely thrown into. Mr. Corbet talked as much as either of the other two gentlemen; opposing and disputing on any side, as if to find out how much he could urge against received opinions. Ellinor sat silent; her dark eyes flashing from time to time in vehement interest—sometimes in vehement indignation, if Mr. Corbet, riding a-tilt at every one, ventured to attack her father. He saw how this course excited her, and rather liked pursuing it in consequence; he thought it only amused him.

Another way in which Ellinor and Mr. Corbet were thrown together occasionally was this: Mr. Ness and Mr. Wilkins shared the same *Times* between them; and it was Ellinor's duty to see that the paper was regularly taken from her father's house to the parsonage. Her father liked to dawdle over it. Until Mr. Corbet had come to live with him, Mr. Ness had not much cared at what time it was passed on to him; but the young man took a strong interest in all public events, and especially in all that was said about them. He grew impatient if the paper was not forthcoming, and would set off himself to go for it, sometimes meeting the penitent, breathless Ellinor in the long lane which led from Hamley to Mr. Wilkins's house. At first he used to receive her eager "Oh! I am so sorry, Mr. Corbet; but papa has only just done with it," rather gruffly. After a time he had the grace to tell her it did not signify; and, by-and-by, he would turn back with her to give her some advice about her garden, or her plants—for his mother and sisters were first-rate practical gardeners, and he himself was, as he expressed it, "a capital consulting physician for a sickly plant."

All this time his voice, his step, never raised the child's colour one shade the higher, never made her heart beat the least quicker, as the slightest sign of her father's approach was wont to do. She learnt to rely on Mr. Corbet for advice, for a little occasional sympathy, and for much condescending attention. He also gave her more fault-finding than all the rest of the world put together; and, curiously enough, she was grateful to him for it, for she really was humble and

wished to improve. He liked the attitude of superiority which this implied and exercised right gave him. They were very good friends at present. Nothing more.

All this time I have spoken only of Mr. Wilkins's life as he stood in relation to his daughter. But there is far more to be said about it. After his wife's death, he withdrew himself from society for a year or two in a more positive and decided manner than is common with widowers. It was during this retirement of his that he riveted his little daughter's heart in such a way as to influence all her future life.

When he began to go out again, it might have been perceived—had any one cared to notice—how much the different characters of his father and wife had influenced him and kept him steady. Not that he broke out into any immoral conduct, but he gave up time to pleasure, which both old Mr. Wilkins and Lettice would have quietly induced him to spend in the office, superintending his business. His indulgence in hunting and all field-sports, had hitherto been only occasional; they now became habitual, as far as the seasons permitted. He shared a moor in Scotland with one of the Holsters one year, persuading himself that the bracing air was good for Ellinor's health. But the year afterwards he took another, this time joining with a comparative stranger; and on this moor there was no house to which it was fit to bring a child and her attendants. He persuaded himself that by frequent journeys he could make up for his absences from Hamley. But journeys cost money; and he was often away from his office when important business required attending to. There was some talk of a new attorney setting up in Hamley, to be supported by one or two of the more influential county-families, who had found Wilkins not so attentive as his father. Sir Frank Holster sent for his relation, and told him of this project, speaking to him, at the same time, in pretty round terms on the folly of the life he was leading. Foolish it certainly was, and as such Mr. Wilkins was secretly acknowledging it; but when Sir Frank, lashing himself, began to talk of his hearer's presumption in

joining the hunt, in aping the mode of life and amusements of the landed gentry, Edward fired up. He knew how much Sir Frank was dipped; and, comparing it with the round sum his own father had left him, he said some plain truths to Sir Frank which the latter never forgave; and henceforth there was no intercourse between Holster Court and Ford Bank, as Mr. Edward Wilkins had christened his father's house on his first return from the Continent.

The conversation had two consequences besides the immediate one of the quarrel. Mr. Wilkins advertised for a responsible and confidential clerk to conduct the business under his own superintendence; and he also wrote to the Heralds' College to ask if he did not belong to the family bearing the same name in South Wales—those who have since re-assumed their ancient name of De Winton.

Both applications were favourably answered. A skilful, experienced, middle-aged clerk was recommended to him by one of the principal legal firms in London, and immediately engaged to come to Hamley at his own terms; which were pretty high. But, as Mr. Wilkins said, it was worth any money to pay for the relief from constant responsibility which such a business as his involved; though some people remarked that he had never appeared to feel the responsibility very much hitherto, as witness his absences in Scotland, and his various social engagements when at home; it had been very different (they said) in his father's day. The Heralds' College held out hopes of affiliating him to the South-Wales family; but it would require time and money to make the requisite inquiries and substantiate the claim. Now, in many a place there would be none to contest the right a man might have to assert that he belonged to such and such a family; or even to assume their arms. But it was otherwise in ——shire. Every one was up in genealogy and heraldry, and considered filching a name and a pedigree a far worse sin than any of those mentioned in the Commandments. There were those among them who would doubt and dispute even the decision of the Heralds' College; but with it, if in

his favour, Mr. Wilkins intended to be satisfied; and accordingly he wrote, in reply to their letter, to say that of course he was aware such inquiries would take a considerable sum of money, but still he wished them to be made, and that speedily.

Before the end of the year he went up to London to order a brougham to be built (for Ellinor to drive out in in wet weather, he said; but, as going in a closed carriage always made her ill, he used it principally himself in driving to dinner-parties), with the De Winton Wilkinses' arms neatly emblazoned on panel and harness. Hitherto he had always gone about in a dog-cart—the immediate descendant of his father's old-fashioned gig.

For all this, the squires, his employers, only laughed at him, and did not treat him with one whit more respect.

Mr. Dunster, the new clerk, was a quiet, respectable-looking man; you could not call him a gentleman in manner, and yet no one could say he was vulgar. He had not much varying expression in his face, but a permanent one of thoughtful consideration of the subject in hand, whatever it might be, that would have fitted as well with the profession of medicine as with that of law, and is quite the right look for either. Occasionally a bright flash of sudden intelligence lightened up his deep-sunk eyes, but even this was quickly extinguished as by some inward repression, and the habitually reflective, subdued expression returned to the face. As soon as he came into his situation, he first began quietly to arrange the papers, and next the business of which they were the outer sign, into more methodical order than they had been in since old Mr. Wilkins's death. Punctual to a moment himself, he looked his displeased surprise when the inferior clerks came tumbling in half-an-hour after the time in the morning; and his look was more effective than many men's words; henceforward the subordinates were within five minutes of the appointed hour for opening the office; but still he was always there before them. Mr. Wilkins himself winced under his new clerk's order and punctuality; Mr.

Dunster's raised eyebrows and contraction of the lips at some woeful confusion in the business of the office, chafed Mr. Wilkins more, far more, than any open expression of opinion would have done; for that he could have met and explained away, as he fancied. A secret respectful dislike grew up in his bosom against Mr. Dunster. He esteemed him, he valued him, and he could not bear him. Year after year, Mr. Wilkins had come to be more under the influence of his feelings, and less under the command of his reason. He rather cherished than repressed his nervous repugnance to the harsh measured tones of Mr. Dunster's voice; the latter spoke with a provincial twang which grated on his employer's sensitive ear. He was annoyed at a certain green coat which his new clerk brought with him, and he watched its increasing shabbiness with a sort of childish pleasure. But by-and-by Mr. Wilkins found out that, from some perversity of taste, Mr. Dunster always had his coats, Sunday and working-day, made of this obnoxious colour; and this knowledge did not diminish his secret irritation. The worst of all, perhaps, was, that Mr. Dunster was really invaluable in many ways; "a perfect treasure," as Mr. Wilkins used to term him in speaking of him after dinner; but, for all that, he came to hate his "perfect treasure," as he gradually felt that Dunster had become so indispensable to the business that his chief could not do without him.

The clients re-echoed Mr. Wilkins's words, and spoke of Mr. Dunster as invaluable to his master; a thorough treasure, the very saving of the business. They had not been better attended to, not even in old Mr. Wilkins's days; such a clear head, such a knowledge of law, such a steady, upright fellow, always at his post. The grating voice, the drawling accent, the bottle-green coat, were nothing to them; far less noticed, in fact, than Wilkins's expensive habits, the money he paid for his wine and horses, and the nonsense of claiming kin with the Welsh Wilkinses, and setting up his brougham to drive about ——shire lanes, and be knocked to pieces over the rough round paving-stones thereof.

All these remarks did not come near Ellinor to trouble her life. To her, her dear father was the first of human beings; so sweet, so good, so kind, so charming in conversation, so full of accomplishment and information! To her healthy, happy mind every one turned their bright side. She loved Miss Monro—all the servants—especially Dixon, the coachman. He had been her father's playfellow as a boy, and, with all his respect and admiration for his master, the freedom of intercourse that had been established between them then had never quite been lost. Dixon was a fine, stalwart old fellow, and was as harmonious in his ways with his master as Mr. Dunster was discordant; accordingly he was a great favourite, and could say many a thing which might have been taken as impertinence from another servant.

He was Ellinor's great confidant about many of her little plans and projects; things that she dared not speak of to Mr. Corbet, who, after her father and Dixon, was her next best friend. This intimacy with Dixon displeased Mr. Corbet. He once or twice insinuated that he did not think it was well to talk so familiarly as Ellinor did with a servant—one out of a completely different class—such as Dixon. Ellinor did not easily take hints; every one had spoken plain out to her hitherto; so Mr. Corbet had to say his meaning plain out at last. Then, for the first time, he saw her angry; but she was too young, too childish, to have words at will to express her feelings; she only could say broken beginnings of sentences, such as "What a shame! Good, dear Dixon, who is as loyal and true and kind as any nobleman! I like him far better than you, Mr. Corbet, and I shall talk to him." And then she burst into tears and ran away, and would not come to wish Mr. Corbet good-bye, though she knew she should not see him again for a long time, as he was returning the next day to his father's house, from whence he would go to Cambridge.

He was annoyed at this result of the good advice he had thought himself bound to give to a motherless girl, who had

no one to instruct her in the proprieties in which his own sisters were brought up; he left Hamley both sorry and displeased. As for Ellinor, when she found out the next day that he really was gone—gone without even coming to Ford Bank again to see if she were not penitent for her angry words—gone without saying or hearing a word of good-bye—she shut herself up in her room, and cried more bitterly than ever, because anger against herself was mixed with her regret for his loss. Luckily, her father was dining out, or he would have inquired what was the matter with his darling; and she would have had to try to explain what could not be explained. As it was, she sat with her back to the light during the schoolroom tea, and afterwards, when Miss Monro had settled down to her study of the Spanish language, Ellinor stole out into the garden, meaning to have a fresh cry over her own naughtiness and Mr. Corbet's departure; but the August evening was still and calm, and put her passionate grief to shame, hushing her up, as it were, with the other young creatures, who were being soothed to rest by the serene time of day and the subdued light of the twilight sky.

There was a piece of ground surrounding the flower-garden, which was not shrubbery, nor wood, nor kitchen-garden—only a grassy bit, out of which a group of old forest-trees sprang. Their roots were heaved above ground; their leaves fell in autumn so profusely that the turf was ragged and bare in spring; but, to make up for this, there never was such a place for snowdrops.

The roots of these old trees were Ellinor's favourite play-place; this space between these two was her doll's kitchen, that its drawing-room, and so on. Mr. Corbet rather despised her contrivances for doll's furniture, so she had not often brought him here; but Dixon delighted in them, and contrived and planned with the eagerness of six years old rather than forty. To-night Ellinor went to this place, and there were all a new collection of ornaments for Miss Dolly's sitting-room made out of fir-bobs, in the prettiest

and most ingenious way. She knew it was Dixon's doing, and rushed off in search of him to thank him.

"What's the matter with my pretty?" asked Dixon, as soon as the pleasant excitement of thanking and being thanked was over, and he had leisure to look at her tear-stained face.

"Oh, I don't know! Never mind," said she, reddening.

Dixon was silent for a minute or two, while she tried to turn off his attention by her hurried prattle.

"There's no trouble a-foot that I can mend?" asked he, in a minute or two.

"Oh, no! It's really nothing—nothing at all," said she. "It's only that Mr. Corbet went away without saying good-bye to me, that's all." And she looked as if she should have liked to cry again.

"That was not manners," said Dixon decisively.

"But it was my fault," replied Ellinor, pleading against the condemnation.

Dixon looked at her pretty sharply from under his ragged bushy eyebrows.

"He had been giving me a lecture, and saying I didn't do what his sisters did—just as if I were to be always trying to be like somebody else—and I was cross and ran away."

"Then it was Missy who wouldn't say good-bye. That was not manners in Missy."

"But, Dixon, I don't like being lectured!"

"I reckon you don't get much of it. But, indeed, my pretty, I dare say Mr. Corbet was in the right; for, you see, master is busy, and Miss Monro is so dreadful learned, and your poor mother is dead and gone, and you have no one to teach you how young ladies go on; and by all accounts Mr. Corbet comes of a good family. I've heard say his father had the best stud-farm in all Shropshire, and spared no money upon it; and the young ladies his sisters will have been taught the best of manners; it might be well for my pretty to hear how they go on."

"You dear old Dixon, you don't know anything about

my lecture, and I'm not going to tell you. Only I dare say Mr. Corbet might be a little bit right, though I'm sure he was a great deal wrong."

"But you'll not go on a-fretting—you won't now, there's a good young lady—for master won't like it, and it'll make him uneasy, and he's enough of trouble without your red eyes, bless them."

"Trouble—papa, trouble! Oh, Dixon! what do you mean?" exclaimed Ellinor, her face taking all a woman's intensity of expression in a minute.

"Nay, I know nought," said Dixon evasively. "Only that Dunster fellow is not to my mind, and I think he potters the master sadly with his fid-fad ways."

"I hate Mr. Dunster!" said Ellinor vehemently. "I won't speak a word to him the next time he comes to dine with papa."

"Missy will do what papa likes best," said Dixon, admonishingly; and with this the pair of "friends" parted.

CHAPTER IV

The summer afterwards, Mr. Corbet came again to read with Mr. Ness. He did not perceive any alteration in himself, and indeed his early-matured character had hardly made progress during the last twelve months, whatever intellectual acquirements he might have made. Therefore it was astonishing to him to see the alteration in Ellinor Wilkins. She had shot up from a rather puny girl to a tall, slight young lady, with promise of great beauty in the face, which a year ago had only been remarkable for the fineness of the eyes. Her complexion was clear now, although colourless—twelve months ago he would have called it sallow—her delicate cheek was smooth as marble, her teeth were even and white, and her rare smiles called out a lovely dimple.

She met her former friend and lecturer with a grave shyness, for she remembered well how they had parted, and thought he could hardly have forgiven, much less forgotten, her passionate flinging away from him. But the truth was, after the first few hours of offended displeasure, he had ceased to think of it at all. She, poor child, by way of proving her repentance, had tried hard to reform her boisterous tom-boy manners, in order to show him that, although she would not give up her dear old friend Dixon, at his or any one's bidding, she would strive to profit by his lectures in all things reasonable. The consequence was, that she suddenly appeared to him as an elegant dignified young lady, instead of the rough little girl he remembered. Still below her somewhat formal manners there lurked the old wild spirit, as he could plainly see after a little more watching; and he began to wish to call this out, and to strive, by reminding her of old days, and all her childish frolics, to flavour her subdued manners and speech with a little of the former originality.

In this he succeeded. No one, neither Mr. Wilkins, nor Miss Monro, nor Mr. Ness, saw what this young couple were about—they did not know it themselves; but before the summer was over they were desperately in love with each other, or perhaps I should rather say, Ellinor was desperately in love with him—he, as passionately as he could be with any one; but in him the intellect was superior in strength to either affections or passions.

The causes of the blindness of those around them were these: Mr. Wilkins still considered Ellinor as a little girl, as his own pet, his darling, but nothing more. Miss Monro was anxious about her own improvement. Mr. Ness was deep in a new edition of "Horace," which he was going to bring out with notes. I believe Dixon would have been keener-sighted, but Ellinor kept Mr. Corbet and Dixon apart for obvious reasons—they were each her dear friends, but she knew that Mr. Corbet did not like Dixon, and suspected that the feeling was mutual.

The only change of circumstances between this year and

the previous one consisted in this development of attachment between the young people. Otherwise, everything went on apparently as usual. With Ellinor the course of the day was something like this: up early and into the garden until breakfast time, when she made tea for her father and Miss Monro in the dining-room, always taking care to lay a little nosegay of freshly-gathered flowers by her father's plate. After breakfast, when the conversation had been on general and indifferent subjects, Mr. Wilkins withdrew into the little study so often mentioned. It opened out of a passage that ran between the dining-room and the kitchen, on the left hand of the hall. Corresponding to the dining-room on the other side of the hall was the drawing-room, with its side-window serving as a door into a conservatory, and this again opened into the library. Old Mr. Wilkins had added a semicircular projection to the library, which was lighted by a dome above, and showed off his son's Italian purchases of sculpture. The library was by far the most striking and agreeable room in the house; and the consequence was that the drawing-room was seldom used, and had the aspect of cold discomfort common to apartments rarely occupied. Mr. Wilkins's study, on the other side of the house, was also an afterthought, built only a few years ago, and projecting from the regularity of the outside wall; a little stone passage led to it from the hall, small, narrow, and dark, and out of which no other door opened.

The study itself was a hexagon, one side window, one fireplace, and the remaining four sides occupied with doors, two of which have been already mentioned, another at the foot of the narrow winding stairs which led straight into Mr. Wilkins's bedroom over the dining-room, and the fourth opening into a path through the shrubbery, to the left of the flower-garden as you looked from the house. This path led through the stable-yard, and then by a short cut right into Hamley, and brought you out close to Mr. Wilkins's office; it was by this way he always went and returned to his business. He used the study for a smoking- and

lounging-room principally, although he always spoke of it as a convenient place for holding confidential communications with such of his clients as did not like discussing their business within the possible hearing of all the clerks in his office. By the outer door he could also pass to the stables, and see that proper care was taken at all times of his favourite and valuable horses. Into this study Ellinor would follow him of a morning, helping him on with his greatcoat, mending his gloves, talking an infinite deal of merry, fond nothings; and then, clinging to his arm, she would accompany him in his visits to the stables, going up to the shyest horses, and petting them, and patting them, and feeding them with bread, all the time that her father held converse with Dixon. When he was finally gone—and sometimes it was a long time first—she returned to the schoolroom to Miss Monro, and tried to set herself hard at work on her lessons. But she had not much time for steady application; if her father had cared for her progress in anything, she would and could have worked hard at that study or accomplishment; but Mr. Wilkins, the ease and pleasure loving man, did not wish to make himself into the pedagogue, as he would have considered it, if he had ever questioned Ellinor with a real steady purpose of ascertaining her intellectual progress. It was quite enough for him that her general intelligence and variety of desultory and miscellaneous reading made her a pleasant and agreeable companion for his hours of relaxation.

At twelve o'clock, Ellinor put away her books with joyful eagerness, kissed Miss Monro, asked her if they should go a regular walk, and was always rather thankful when it was decided that it would be better to stroll in the garden—a decision very often come to, for Miss Monro hated fatigue, hated dirt, hated scrambling, and dreaded rain; all of which are evils, the chances of which are never far distant from country walks. So Ellinor danced out into the garden, worked away among her flowers, played at the old games among the roots of the trees, and, when she could, seduced

Dixon into the flower-garden to have a little consultation as to the horses and dogs. For it was one of her father's few strict rules that Ellinor was never to go into the stable-yard unless he were with her; so these *tête-à-têtes* with Dixon were always held in the flower-garden, or bit of forest ground surrounding it. Miss Monro sat and basked in the sun, close to the dial, which made the centre of the gay flower-beds, upon which the dining-room and study windows looked.

At one o'clock, Ellinor and Miss Monro dined. An hour was allowed for Miss Monro's digestion, which Ellinor again spent out of doors, and at three, lessons began again and lasted till five. At that time they went to dress, in readiness for the school-room tea at half-past five. After tea Ellinor tried to prepare her lessons for the next day; but all the time she was listening for her father's footstep—the moment she heard that, she dashed down her book, and flew out of the room to welcome and kiss him. Seven was his dinner-hour; he hardly ever dined alone; indeed, he often dined from home four days out of seven, and when he had no engagement to take him out he liked to have some one to keep him company: Mr. Ness very often, Mr. Corbet along with him if he was in Hamley, or a stranger friend, or one of his clients. Sometimes, reluctantly, and when he fancied he could not avoid the attention without giving offence, Mr. Wilkins would ask Mr. Dunster; and then the two would always follow Ellinor into the library at a very early hour, as if their subjects for *tête-à-tête* conversation were quite exhausted. With all his other visitors, Mr. Wilkins sat long—yes, and yearly longer; with Mr. Ness, because they became interested in each other's conversation; with some of the others, because the wine was good, and the host hated to spare it.

Mr. Corbet used to leave his tutor and Mr. Wilkins and saunter into the library. There sat Ellinor and Miss Monro, each busy with her embroidery. He would bring a stool to Ellinor's side, question and tease her, interest her, and they

would become entirely absorbed in each other, Miss Monro's sense of propriety being entirely set at rest by the consideration that Mr. Wilkins must know what he was about in allowing a young man to become thus intimate with his daughter, who, after all, was but a child.

Mr. Corbet had lately fallen into the habit of walking up to Ford Bank for the *Times* every day, near twelve o'clock, and lounging about in the garden until one; not exactly with either Ellinor or Miss Monro, but certainly far more at the beck and call of the one than of the other.

Miss Monro used to think he would have been glad to stay and lunch at their early dinner; but she never gave the invitation, and he could not well stay without her expressed sanction. He told Ellinor all about his mother and sisters, and their ways of going on, and spoke of them and of his father as of people she was one day certain to know, and to know intimately; and she did not question or doubt this view of things; she simply acquiesced.

He had some discussion with himself as to whether he should speak to her, and so secure her promise to be his before returning to Cambridge, or not. He did not like the formality of an application to Mr. Wilkins, which would, after all, have been the proper and straightforward course to pursue with a girl of her age—she was barely sixteen. Not that he anticipated any difficulty on Mr. Wilkins's part; his approval of the intimacy, which at their respective ages was pretty sure to lead to an attachment, was made as evident as could be by actions without words. But there would have to be reference to his own father, who had no notion of the whole affair, and would be sure to treat it as a boyish fancy; as if at twenty-one Ralph was not a man, clear and deliberate in knowing his own mind, as resolute as he ever would be in deciding upon the course of exertion that should lead him to independence and fame, if such were to be attained by clear intellect and a strong will.

No; to Mr. Wilkins he would not speak for another year or two.

But should he tell Ellinor in direct terms of his love—his intention to marry her?

Again he inclined to the more prudent course of silence. He was not afraid of any change in his own inclinations; of them he was sure. But he looked upon it in this way: If he made a regular declaration to her, she would be bound to tell it to her father. He should not respect her or like her so much, if she did not. And yet this course would lead to all the conversations, and discussions, and references to his own father, which made his own direct appeal to Mr. Wilkins appear a premature step to him.

Whereas, he was as sure of Ellinor's love for him as if she had uttered all the vows that women ever spoke; he knew even better than she did how fully and entirely that innocent girlish heart was his own. He was too proud to dread her inconstancy for an instant; "besides," as he went on to himself, as if to make assurance doubly sure, "whom does she see? Those stupid Holsters, who ought to be only too proud of having such a girl for their cousin, ignore her existence, and spoke slightingly of her father only the very last time I dined there. The country people in this perfectly Bœotian ——shire clutch at me because my father goes up to the Plantagenets for his pedigree—not one whit for myself—and neglect Ellinor; and only condescend to her father because old Wilkins was nobody-knows-who's son. So much the worse for them; but so much the better for me in this case. I'm above their silly, antiquated prejudices, and shall be only too glad when the fitting time comes to make Ellinor my wife. After all, a prosperous attorney's daughter may not be considered an unsuitable match for me —younger son as I am. Ellinor will make a glorious woman three or four years hence; just the style my father admires —such a figure, such limbs. I'll be patient, and bide my time, and watch my opportunities, and all will come right."

So he bade Ellinor farewell in a most reluctant and affectionate manner, although his words might have been spoken out in Hamley market-place, and were little different

from what he said to Miss Monro. Mr. Wilkins half-expected a disclosure to himself of the love which he suspected in the young man; and, when that did not come, he prepared himself for a confidence from Ellinor. But she had nothing to tell him, as he very well perceived from the child's open unembarrassed manner, when they were left alone together after dinner. He had refused an invitation, and shaken off Mr. Ness, in order to have this confidential *tête-à-tête* with his motherless girl; and there was nothing to make confidence of. He was half-inclined to be angry; but then he saw that, although sad, she was so much at peace with herself and with the world, that he, always an optimist, began to think the young man had done wisely in not tearing open the rosebud of her feelings too prematurely.

The next two years passed over in much the same way —or a careless spectator might have thought so. I have heard people say, that, if you look at a regiment advancing with steady step over a plain on a review-day, you can hardly tell that they are not merely marking time on one spot of ground, unless you compare their position with some other object by which to mark their progress, so even is the repetition of the movement. And thus the sad events of the future life of this father and daughter were hardly perceived in their steady advance, and yet over the monotony and flat uniformity of their days sorrow came marching down upon them like an armed man. Long before Mr. Wilkins had recognised its shape, it was approaching him in the distance—as, in fact, it is approaching all of us at this very time; you, reader, I, writer, have each our great sorrow bearing down upon us. It may be yet beyond the dimmest point of our horizon; but in the stillness of the night our hearts shrink at the sound of its coming footstep. Well is it for those who fall into the hands of the Lord rather than into the hands of men; but worst of all is it for him who has hereafter to mingle the gall of remorse with the cup held out to him by his doom.

Mr. Wilkins took his ease and his pleasure yet more and

more every year of his life; nor did the quality of his ease and his pleasure improve; it seldom does with self-indulgent people. He cared less for any books that strained his faculties a little—less for engravings and sculptures—perhaps more for pictures. He spent extravagantly on his horses; "thought of eating and drinking." There was no open vice in all this, so that any awful temptation to crime should come down upon him, and startle him out of his mode of thinking and living; half the people about him did much the same, as far as their lives were patent to his unreflecting observation. But most of his associates had their duties to do, and did them with a heart and a will, in the hours when he was not in their company. Yes! I call them duties, though some of them might be self-imposed and purely social; they were engagements they had entered into, either tacitly or with words, and that they fulfilled. From Mr. Hetherington, the Master of the Hounds, who was up at—no one knows what hour, to go down to the kennel and see that the men did their work well and thoroughly, to stern old Sir Lionel Playfair, the upright magistrate, the thoughtful, conscientious landlord—they did their work according to their lights; there were few laggards among those with whom Mr. Wilkins associated in the field or at the dinner-table. Mr. Ness—though as a clergyman he was not so active as he might have been—yet even Mr. Ness fagged away with his pupils and his new edition of one of the classics. Only Mr. Wilkins, dissatisfied with his position, neglected to fulfil the duties thereof. He imitated the pleasures, and longed for the fancied leisure of those about him; leisure that he imagined would be so much more valuable in the hands of a man like himself, full of intellectual tastes and accomplishments, than frittered away by dull boors of untravelled, uncultivated squires—whose company, however, be it said by the way, he never refused.

And yet daily Mr. Wilkins was sinking from the intellectually to the sensually self-indulgent man. He lay late in bed, and hated Mr. Dunster for his significant glance at

the office-clock, when he announced to his master that such and such a client had been waiting more than an hour to keep an appointment. "Why didn't you see him yourself, Dunster? I'm sure you would have done quite as well as I," Mr. Wilkins sometimes replied, partly with a view of saying something pleasant to the man whom he disliked and feared. Mr. Dunster always replied, in a meek matter-of-fact tone, "Oh, sir, they wouldn't like to talk over their affairs with a subordinate."

And every time he said this, or some speech of the same kind, the idea came more and more clearly into Mr. Wilkins's head, of how pleasant it would be to himself to take Dunster into partnership, and thus throw all the responsibility of the real work and drudgery upon his clerk's shoulders. Importunate clients, who would make appointments at unseasonable hours and would keep to them, might confide in the partner, though they would not in the clerk. The great objections to this course were, first and foremost, Mr. Wilkins's strong dislike to Mr. Dunster—his repugnance to his company, his dress, his voice, his ways—all of which irritated his employer, till his state of feeling towards Dunster might be called antipathy; next, Mr. Wilkins was fully aware of the fact that all Mr. Dunster's actions and words were carefully and thoughtfully pre-arranged to further the great unspoken desire of his life—that of being made a partner where he now was only a servant. Mr. Wilkins took a malicious pleasure in tantalising Mr. Dunster by such speeches as the one I have just mentioned, which always seemed like an opening to the desired end, but still for a long time never led any further. Yet all the while that end was becoming more and more certain, and at last it was reached.

Mr. Dunster always suspected that the final push was given by some circumstance from without; some reprimand for neglect—some threat of withdrawal of business which his employer had received; but of this he could not be certain; all he knew was, that Mr. Wilkins proposed the partnership to him in about as ungracious a way as such an

offer could be made; an ungraciousness which, after all, had so little effect on the real matter in hand, that Mr. Dunster could pass over it with a private sneer, while taking all possible advantage of the tangible benefit it was now in his power to accept.

Mr. Corbet's attachment to Ellinor had been formally disclosed to her just before this time. He had left college, entered at the Middle Temple, and was fagging away at law, and feeling success in his own power; Ellinor was to "come out" at the next Hamley assemblies; and her lover began to be jealous of the possible admirers her striking appearance and piquant conversation might attract, and thought it a good time to make the success of his suit certain by spoken words and promises.

He needed not have alarmed himself, even enough to make him take this step, if he had been capable of understanding Ellinor's heart as fully as he did her appearance and conversation. She never missed the absence of formal words and promises. She considered herself as fully engaged to him, as much pledged to marry him and no one else, before he had asked the final question, as afterwards. She was rather surprised at the necessity for those decisive words—

"Ellinor, dearest, will you—can you marry me?" and her reply was given with a deep blush I must record, and in a soft murmuring tone—

"Yes—oh, yes—I never thought of anything else."

"Then I may speak to your father, may not I, darling?"

"He knows; I am sure he knows; and he likes you so much. Oh, how happy I am!"

"But still I must speak to him before I go. When can I see him, my Ellinor? I must go back to town at four o'clock."

"I heard his voice in the stable-yard, only just before you came. Let me go and find out if he is gone to the office yet."

No! to be sure he was not gone. He was quietly smoking

a cigar in his study, sitting in an easy-chair near the open window, and leisurely glancing at all the advertisements in the *Times*. He hated going to the office more and more since Dunster had become a partner; that fellow gave himself such airs of investigation and reprehension.

He got up, took the cigar out of his mouth, and placed a chair for Mr. Corbet, knowing well why he had thus formally prefaced his entrance into the room with a—

"Can I have a few minutes' conversation with you, Mr. Wilkins?"

"Certainly, my dear fellow. Sit down. Will you have a cigar?"

"No! I never smoke." Mr. Corbet despised all these kinds of indulgences, and put a little severity into his refusal, but quite unintentionally; for, though he was thankful he was not as other men, he was not at all the person to trouble himself unnecessarily with their reformation.

"I want to speak to you about Ellinor. She says she thinks you must be aware of our mutual attachment."

"Well," said Mr. Wilkins—he had resumed his cigar, partly to conceal his agitation at what he knew was coming —"I believe I have had my suspicions. It is not very long since I was young myself." And he sighed over the recollection of Lettice, and his fresh, hopeful youth.

"And I hope, sir, as you have been aware of it, and have never manifested any disapprobation of it, that you will not refuse your consent—a consent I now ask you for—to our marriage."

Mr. Wilkins did not speak for a little while—a touch, a thought, a word more would have brought him to tears; for at the last he found it hard to give the consent which would part him from his only child. Suddenly he got up, and putting his hand into that of the anxious lover (for his silence had rendered Mr. Corbet anxious up to a certain point of perplexity—he could not understand the implied "he would and he would not"), Mr. Wilkins said—

"Yes! God bless you both! I will give her to you,

some day—only it must be a long time first. And now go away—go back to her—for I can't stand this much longer."

Mr. Corbet returned to Ellinor. Mr. Wilkins sat down and buried his head in his hands, then went to his stable, and had Wildfire saddled for a good gallop over the country. Mr. Dunster waited for him in vain at the office, where an obstinate old country gentleman from a distant part of the shire would ignore Dunster's existence as a partner, and pertinaciously demanded to see Mr. Wilkins on important business.

CHAPTER V

A FEW days afterwards, Ellinor's father bethought himself that some further communication ought to take place between him and his daughter's lover regarding the approval of the family of the latter to the young man's engagement; and he accordingly wrote a very gentlemanly letter, saying that of course he trusted that Ralph had informed his father of his engagement; that Mr. Corbet was well known to Mr. Wilkins by reputation, holding the position which he did in Shropshire; but that, as Mr. Wilkins did not pretend to be in the same station of life, Mr. Corbet might possibly never even have heard of his name, although in his own county it was well known as having been for generations that of the principal conveyancer and land-agent of ——shire; that his wife had been a member of the old knightly family of Holsters, and that he himself was descended from a younger branch of the South Wales de Wintons, or Wilkinses; that Ellinor, as his only child, would naturally inherit all his property, but that in the meantime, of course, some settlement upon her would be made, the nature of which might be decided nearer the time of the marriage.

It was a very good, straightforward letter, and well-fitted

for the purpose to which Mr. Wilkins knew it would be applied—of being forwarded to the young man's father. One would have thought that it was not an engagement so disproportionate in point of station as to cause any great opposition on that score; but, unluckily, Captain Corbet, the heir and eldest son, had just formed a similar engagement with Lady Maria Brabant, the daughter of one of the proudest magnates in ——shire, who had always resented Mr. Wilkins's appearance on the field as an insult to the county, and ignored his presence at every dinner-table where they met. Lady Maria was visiting the Corbets at the very time when Ralph's letter, enclosing Mr. Wilkins's, reached the paternal halls; and she merely repeated her father's opinions, when Mrs. Corbet and her daughters naturally questioned her as to who these Wilkinses were; they remembered the name in Ralph's letters formerly; the father was some friend of Mr. Ness's, the clergyman with whom Ralph had read; they believed Ralph used to dine with these Wilkinses sometimes, along with Mr. Ness.

Lady Maria was a good-natured girl, and meant no harm in repeating her father's words; touched up, it is true, by some of the dislike she herself felt to the intimate alliance proposed, which would make her sister-in-law to the daughter of an "upstart attorney," "not received in the county," "always trying to push his way into the set above him," "claiming connection with the De Wintons of —— Castle, who, as she well knew, only laughed when he was spoken of, and said they were more rich in relations than they were aware of"—"not people papa would ever like her to know, whatever might be the family connection."

These little speeches told in a way which the girl who uttered them did not intend they should. Mrs. Corbet and her daughters set themselves violently against this foolish entanglement of Ralph's; they would not call it an engagement. They argued, and they urged, and they pleaded, till the squire, anxious for peace at any price, and always more under the sway of the people who were with him, however

unreasonable they might be, than of the absent, even though these had the wisdom of Solomon or the prudence and sagacity of his son Ralph, wrote an angry letter, saying that, as Ralph was of age, of course he had a right to please himself; therefore, all his father could say was, that the engagement was not at all what either he or Ralph's mother had expected or hoped; that it was a degradation to a family just going to ally themselves with a peer of James the First's creation; that of course Ralph must do what he liked, but that if he married this girl he must never expect to have her received by the Corbets of Corbet Hall as a daughter. The squire was rather satisfied with his production, and took it to show it to his wife; but she did not think it was strong enough, and added a little postscript–

"Dear Ralph,—Though, as second son, you are entitled to Bromley at my death, yet I can do much to make the estate worthless. Hitherto, regard for you has prevented my taking steps as to sale of timber, &c., which would materially increase your sisters' portions; this just measure I shall infallibly take, if I find you persevere in keeping to this silly engagement. Your father's disapproval is always a sufficient reason to allege."

Ralph was annoyed at the receipt of these letters, though he only smiled as he locked them up in his desk.

"Dear old father; how he blusters! As to my mother, she is reasonable when I talk to her. Once give her a definite idea of what Ellinor's fortune will be, and let her, if she chooses, cut down her timber—a threat she has held over me ever since I knew what a rocking-horse was, and which I have known to be illegal these ten years past—and she'll come round. I know better than they do how Reginald has run up post-obits; and, as for that vulgar high-born Lady Maria they are all so full of, why, she is a Flanders mare to my Ellinor, and has not a silver penny to cross herself with, besides! I bide my time, you dear good people!"

He did not think it necessary to reply to these letters immediately, nor did he even allude to their contents in his to Ellinor. Mr. Wilkins, who had been very well satisfied with his own letter to the young man, and had thought that it must be equally agreeable to every one, was not at all suspicious of any disapproval, because the fact of a distinct sanction on the part of Mr. Ralph Corbet's friends to his engagement was not communicated to him.

As for Ellinor, she trembled all over with happiness. Such a summer for the blossoming of flowers and ripening of fruit had not been known for years ; it seemed to her as if bountiful loving Nature wanted to fill the cup of Ellinor's joy to overflowing, and as if everything, animate and inanimate, sympathised with her happiness. Her father was well, and apparently content. Miss Monro was very kind. Dixon's lameness was quite gone off. Only Mr. Dunster came creeping about the house, on pretence of business, seeking out her father, and disturbing all his leisure with his dust-coloured, parchment-skinned, care-worn face, and seeming to disturb the smooth current of her daily life whenever she saw him.

Ellinor made her appearance at the Hamley assemblies but with less *éclat* than either her father or her lover expected. Her beauty and natural grace were admired by those who could discriminate; but to the greater number there was (what they called) "a want of style"—want of elegance there certainly was not, for her figure was perfect, and, though she moved shyly, she moved well. Perhaps it was not a good place for a correct appreciation of Miss Wilkins; some of the old dowagers thought it a piece of presumption in her to be there at all—but the Lady Holster of the day (who remembered her husband's quarrel with Mr. Wilkins, and looked away whenever Ellinor came near) resented this opinion. "Miss Wilkins is descended from Sir Frank's family, one of the oldest in the county; the objection might have been made years ago to the father; but, as he had been received, she did not know why Miss Wilkins

was to be alluded to as out of her place." Ellinor's greatest enjoyment in the evening was to hear her father say, after all was over, and they were driving home—

"Well, I thought my Nelly the prettiest girl there; and I think I know some other people who would have said the same—if they could have spoken out."

"Thank you, papa," said Ellinor, squeezing his hand, which she held. She thought he alluded to the absent Ralph as the person who would have agreed with him, had he had the opportunity of seeing her; but no, he seldom thought much of the absent, but had been rather flattered by seeing Lord Hildebrand take up his glass for the apparent purpose of watching Ellinor.

"Your pearls, too, were as handsome as any in the room, child—but we must have them re-set; the sprays are old-fashioned now. Let me have them to-morrow to send up to Hancock."

"Papa, please, I had rather keep them as they are—as mamma wore them."

He was touched in a minute.

"Very well, darling. God bless you for thinking of it!"

But he ordered her a set of sapphires instead, for the next assembly.

These balls were not such as to intoxicate Ellinor with success, and make her in love with gaiety. Large parties came from the different country-houses in the neighbourhood, and danced with each other. When they had exhausted the resources they brought with them, they had generally a few dances to spare for friends of the same standing with whom they were most intimate. Ellinor came with her father, and joined an old card-playing dowager, by way of a chaperone—the said dowager being under old business obligations to the firm of Wilkins & Son, and apologising to all her acquaintances for her own weak condescension to Mr. Wilkins's foible in wishing to introduce his daughter into society above her natural sphere. It was upon this lady, after she had uttered some such speech as the one I have just

mentioned, that Lady Holster had come down with the pedigree of Ellinor's mother. But, though the old dowager had drawn back a little discomfited at my lady's reply, she was not more attentive to Ellinor in consequence. She allowed Mr. Wilkins to bring in his daughter and place her on the crimson sofa beside her; spoke to her occasionally in the interval that elapsed before the rubbers could be properly arranged in the card-room; invited the girl to accompany her to that sober amusement; and, on Ellinor's declining, and preferring to remain with her father, the dowager left her with a sweet smile on her plump countenance, and an approving conscience somewhere within her portly frame, assuring her that she had done all that could possibly have been expected from her towards "that good Wilkins's daughter." Ellinor stood by her father watching the dances, and thankful for the occasional chance of a dance. While she had been sitting by her chaperone, Mr. Wilkins had made the tour of the room, dropping out the little fact of his daughter's being present, wherever he thought the seed likely to bring forth the fruit of partners. And some came because they liked Mr. Wilkins, and some asked Ellinor because they had done their duty dances to their own party and might please themselves. So that she usually had an average of one invitation to every three dances; and this principally towards the end of the evening.

But, considering her real beauty, and the care which her father always took about her appearance, she met with far less than her due of admiration. Admiration she did not care for; partners she did; and sometimes felt mortified when she had to sit or stand quiet during all the first part of the evening. If it had not been for her father's wishes she would much rather have stayed at home; but, nevertheless, she talked even to the irresponsive old dowager, and fairly chatted to her father when she got beside him, because she did not like him to fancy that she was not enjoying herself.

And, indeed, she had so much happiness in the daily course of this part of her life, that, on looking back upon it

afterwards, she could not imagine anything brighter than it had been. The delight of receiving her lover's letters—the anxious happiness of replying to them (always a little bit fearful lest she should not express herself and her love in the precisely happy medium becoming a maiden)—the father's love and satisfaction in her—the calm prosperity of the whole household—was delightful at the time, and, looking back upon it, it was dreamlike.

Occasionally Mr. Corbet came down to see her. He always slept on these occasions at Mr. Ness's; but he was at Ford Bank the greater part of the one day between two nights that he allowed himself for the length of his visits. And even these short peeps were not frequently taken. He was working hard at law: fagging at it tooth and nail; arranging his whole life so as best to promote the ends of his ambition; feeling a delight in surpassing and mastering his fellows—those who started in the race at the same time. He read Ellinor's letters over and over again; nothing else besides law-books. He perceived the repressed love hidden away in subdued expressions in her communications, with an amused pleasure at the attempt at concealment. He was glad that her gaieties were not more gay; he was glad that she was not too much admired, although a little indignant at the want of taste on the part of the ——shire gentlemen. But, if other admirers had come prominently forward, he would have had to take some more decided steps to assert his rights than he had hitherto done; for he had caused Ellinor to express a wish to her father, that her engagement should not be too much talked about until nearer the time when it would be prudent for him to marry her. He thought that the knowledge of this, the only imprudently hasty step he ever meant to take in his life, might go against his character for wisdom, if the fact became known while he was yet only a student. Mr. Wilkins wondered a little, but acceded, as he always did, to any of Ellinor's requests. Mr. Ness was a confidant, of course, and some of Lady Maria's connections heard of it, and forgot it again very soon; and,

as it happened, no one else was sufficiently interested in Ellinor to care to ascertain the fact.

All this time, Mr. Ralph Corbet maintained a very quietly decided attitude towards his own family. He was engaged to Miss Wilkins; and all he could say was, he felt sorry that they disapproved of it. He was not able to marry just at present, and before the time for his marriage arrived he trusted that his family would take a more reasonable view of things, and be willing to receive her as his wife with all becoming respect or affection. This was the substance of what he repeated in different forms, in reply to his father's angry letters. At length, his invariable determination made way with his father; the paternal thunderings were subdued to a distant rumbling in the sky; and presently the inquiry was broached as to how much fortune Miss Wilkins would have; how much down on her marriage; what were the eventual probabilities. Now this was a point which Mr. Ralph Corbet himself wished to be informed upon. He had not thought much about it in making the engagement; he had been too young, or too much in love. But an only child of a wealthy attorney ought to have something considerable; and an allowance so as to enable the young couple to start housekeeping in a moderately good part of town, would be an advantage to him in his profession. So he replied to his father, adroitly suggesting that a letter, containing certain modifications of the inquiry which had been rather roughly put in Mr. Corbet's last, should be sent to him, in order that he might himself ascertain from Mr. Wilkins what were Ellinor's prospects as regarded fortune.

The desired letter came: but not in such a form that he could pass it on to Mr. Wilkins; he preferred to make quotations, and even these quotations were a little altered and dressed before he sent them on. The gist of his letter to Mr. Wilkins was this. He stated that he hoped soon to be in a position to offer Ellinor a home; that he anticipated a steady progress in his profession, and consequently in his income; but that contingencies might arise, as his father

suggested, which would deprive him of the power of earning a livelihood, perhaps when it might be more required than it would be at first; that it was true that, after his mother's death, a small estate in Shropshire would come to him as second son, and of course Ellinor would receive the benefit of this property, secured to her legally as Mr. Wilkins thought best—that being a matter for after discussion—but that at present his father was anxious, as might be seen from the extract, to ascertain whether Mr. Wilkins could secure him from the contingency of having his son's widow and possible children thrown upon his hands, by giving Ellinor a dowry; and if so, it was gently insinuated, what would be the amount of the same?

When Mr. Wilkins received this letter, it startled him out of a happy day-dream. He liked Ralph Corbet and the whole connection quite well enough to give his consent to an engagement; and sometimes even he was glad to think that Ellinor's future was assured, and that she would have a protector and friends after he was dead and gone. But he did not want them to assume their responsibilites so soon. He had not distinctly contemplated her marriage as an event likely to happen before his death. He could not understand how his own life would go on without her: or indeed why she and Ralph Corbet could not continue just as they were at present. He came down to breakfast with the letter in his hand. By Ellinor's blushes, as she glanced at the hand-writing, he knew that she had heard from her lover by the same post; by her tender caresses—caresses given as if to make up for the pain which the prospect of her leaving him was sure to cause him—he was certain that she was aware of the contents of the letter. Yet he put it in his pocket, and tried to forget it.

He did this not merely from his reluctance to complete any arrangements which might facilitate Ellinor's marriage. There was a further annoyance connected with the affair. His money matters had been for some time in an involved state; he had been living beyond his income, even reckoning

that, as he always did, at the highest point which it ever touched. He kept no regular accounts, reasoning with himself—or, perhaps, I should rather say persuading himself—that there was no great occasion for regular accounts, when he had a steady income arising from his profession, as well as the interest of a good sum of money left him by his father; and when, living in his own house near a country town where provisions were cheap, his expenditure for his small family—only one child—could never amount to anything like his incomings from the above-mentioned sources. But servants and horses, and choice wines and rare fruit-trees, and a habit of purchasing any book or engraving that may take the fancy, irrespective of the price, run away with money, even though there be but one child. A year or two ago, Mr. Wilkins had been startled into a system of exaggerated retrenchment—retrenchment which only lasted about six weeks—by the sudden bursting of a bubble speculation in which he had invested a part of his father's savings. But, as soon as the change in his habits, necessitated by his new economies, became irksome, he had comforted himself for his relapse into his former easy extravagance of living by remembering the fact that Ellinor was engaged to the son of a man of large property: and that, though Ralph was only the second son, yet his mother's estate must come to him, as Mr. Ness had already mentioned, on first hearing of her engagement.

Mr. Wilkins did not doubt that he could easily make Ellinor a fitting allowance, or even pay down a requisite dowry; but the doing so would involve an examination into the real state of his affairs, and this involved distasteful trouble. He had no idea how much more than mere temporary annoyance would arise out of the investigation. Until it was made, he decided in his own mind that he would not speak to Ellinor on the subject of her lover's letter. So for the next few days she was kept in suspense, seeing little of her father; and during the short times she was with him she was made aware that he was nervously

anxious to keep the conversation engaged on general topics rather than on the one which she had at heart. As I have already said, Mr. Corbet had written to her by the same post as that on which he sent the letter to her father, telling her of its contents, and begging her (in all those sweet words which lovers know how to use) to urge her father to compliance for his sake—his, her lover's—who was pining and lonely in all the crowds of London, since her loved presence was not there. He did not care for money, save as a means of hastening their marriage; indeed, if there were only some income fixed, however small—some time for their marriage fixed, however distant—he could be patient. He did not want superfluity of wealth; his habits were simple, as she well knew; and money enough would be theirs in time, both from her share of contingencies and from the certainty of his finally possessing Bromley.

Ellinor delayed replying to this letter until her father should have spoken to her on the subject. But, as she perceived that he avoided all such conversation, the young girl's heart failed her. She began to blame herself for wishing to leave him, to reproach herself for being accessory to any step which made him shun being alone with her, and look distressed and full of care as he did now. It was the usual struggle between father and lover for the possession of love, instead of the natural and graceful resignation of the parent to the prescribed course of things; and, as usual, it was the poor girl who bore the suffering for no fault of her own: although she blamed herself for being the cause of the disturbance in the previous order of affairs. Ellinor had no one to speak to confidentially but her father and her lover, and when they were at issue she could talk openly to neither; so she brooded over Mr. Corbet's unanswered letter, and her father's silence, and became pale and dispirited. Once or twice she looked up suddenly, and caught her father's eye gazing upon her with a certain wistful anxiety; but the instant she saw this he pulled himself up, as it were, and would begin talking gaily about the small topics of the day.

At length Mr. Corbet grew impatient at not hearing either from Mr. Wilkins or Ellinor, and wrote urgently to the former, making known to him a new proposal suggested to him by his father, which was, that a certain sum should be paid down by Mr. Wilkins, to be applied, under the management of trustees, to the improvement of the Bromley estate, out of the profits of which, or other sources in the elder Mr. Corbet's hands, a heavy rate of interest should be paid on this advance, which would secure an income to the young couple immediately, and considerably increase the value of the estate upon which Ellinor's settlement was to be made. The terms offered for this laying down of ready money were so advantageous, that Mr. Wilkins was strongly tempted to accede to them at once, as Ellinor's pale cheek and want of appetite had only that very morning smitten upon his conscience; and this immediate transfer of ready money was as a sacrifice, a soothing balm to his self-reproach, and laziness and dislike to immediate unpleasantness of action had its counterbalancing weakness in imprudence. Mr. Wilkins made some rough calculations on a piece of paper—deeds, and all such tests of accuracy, being down at the office; discovered that he could pay down the sum required; wrote a letter agreeing to the proposal, and before he sealed it called Ellinor into his study, and bade her read what he had been writing and tell him what she thought of it. He watched the colour come rushing into her white face, her lips quiver and tremble, and even before the letter was ended she was in his arms kissing him, and thanking him with blushing caresses rather than words.

"There, there!" said he, smiling and sighing; "that will do. Why, I do believe you took me for a hard-hearted father, just like a heroine's father in a book. You've looked as woe-begone this week past as Ophelia. One can't make up one's mind in a day about such sums of money as this, little woman; and you should have let your old father have time to consider."

"Oh, papa; I was only afraid you were angry."

"Well, if I was a bit perplexed, seeing you look so ill and pining was not the way to bring me round. Old Corbet, I must say, is trying to make a good bargain for his son. It is well for me that I have never been an extravagant man."

"But, papa, we don't want all this much."

"Yes, yes! it is all right. You shall go into their family as a well-portioned girl, if you can't go as a Lady Maria. Come, don't trouble your little head any more about it. Give me one more kiss, and then we'll go and order the horses, and have a ride together, by way of keeping holiday. I deserve a holiday, don't I, Nelly?"

Some country people at work at the roadside, as the father and daughter passed along, stopped to admire their bright, happy looks; and one spoke of the hereditary handsomeness of the Wilkins family (for the old man, the present Mr. Wilkins's father, had been fine-looking in his drab breeches and gaiters, and with his usual assumption of a yeoman's dress). Another said it was easy for the rich to be handsome; they had always plenty to eat, and could ride when they were tired of walking, and had no care for the morrow to keep them from sleeping at nights. And, in sad acquiescence with their contrasted lot, the men went on with their hedging and ditching in silence.

And yet, if they had known—if the poor did know—the troubles and temptations of the rich; if those men had foreseen the lot darkening over the father, and including the daughter in its cloud; if Mr. Wilkins himself had even imagined such a future possible. . . . Well, there was truth in the old heathen saying, "Let no man be envied till his death."

Ellinor had no more rides with her father; no, not ever again; though they had stopped that afternoon at the summit of a breezy common, and looked at a ruined hall, not so very far off, and discussed whether they could reach it that day, and decided that it was too far away for anything but a hurried inspection, and that some day soon they would make the old place into the principal object of an

excursion. But a rainy time came on, when no rides were possible; and whether it was the influence of the weather, or that some other care or trouble oppressed him, Mr. Wilkins seemed to lose all wish for much active exercise, and rather sought a stimulus to his spirits and circulation in wine. But of this Ellinor was innocently unaware. He seemed dull and weary, and sat long, drowsing and drinking after dinner. If the servants had not been so fond of him for much previous generosity and kindness, they would have complained now, and with reason, of his irritability, for all sorts of things seemed to annoy him.

"You should get the master to take a ride with you, miss," said Dixon one day, as he was putting Ellinor on her horse. "He's not looking well. He's studying too much at the office."

But, when Ellinor named it to her father, he rather hastily replied that it was all very well for women to ride out whenever they liked—men had something else to do; and then, as he saw her look grave and puzzled, he softened down his abrupt saying by adding that Dunster had been making a fuss about his partner's non-attendance, and altogether taking a good deal upon himself in a very offensive way, so that he thought it better to go pretty regularly to the office, in order to show him who was master—senior partner, and head of the business, at any rate.

Ellinor sighed a little over her disappointment at her father's preoccupation, and then forgot her own little regret in anger at Mr. Dunster, who had seemed all along to be a thorn in her father's side, and had latterly gained some power and authority over him, the exercise of which, Ellinor could not help thinking, was a very impertinent line of conduct from a junior partner, so lately only a paid clerk, to his superior. There was a sense of something wrong in the Ford Bank household for many weeks about this time. Mr. Wilkins was not like himself, and his cheerful ways and careless genial speeches were missed, even on the days when he was not irritable, and evidently uneasy with himself and

all about him. The spring was late in coming, and cold rain and sleet made any kind of outdoor exercise a trouble and discomfort, rather than a bright natural event in the course of the day. All sound of winter gaieties, of assemblies and meets, and jovial dinners, had died away, and the summer pleasures were as yet unthought of. Still Ellinor had a secret perennial source of sunshine in her heart; whenever she thought of Ralph she could not feel much oppression from the present unspoken and indistinct gloom. He loved her; and oh, how she loved him! and perhaps this very next autumn——but that depended on his own success in his profession. After all, if it was not this autumn it would be the next; and with the letters that she received weekly, and the occasional visits that her lover ran down to Hamley to pay Mr. Ness, Ellinor felt as if she would almost prefer the delay of the time when she must leave her father's for a husband's roof.

CHAPTER VI

At Easter—just when the heavens and earth were looking their dreariest, for Easter fell very early this year—Mr. Corbet came down. Mr. Wilkins was too busy to see much of him; they were together even less than usual, although not less friendly when they did meet. But to Ellinor the visit was one of unmixed happiness. Hitherto she had always had a little fear mingled up with her love of Mr. Corbet; but his manners were softened, his opinions less decided and abrupt, and his whole treatment of her showed such tenderness, that the young girl basked and revelled in it. One or two of their conversations had reference to their future married life in London; and she then perceived, although it did not jar against her, that her lover had not forgotten his ambition in his love. He tried to inoculate her with something of his

own craving for success in life; but it was all in vain: she nestled to him, and told him she did not care to be the Lord Chancellor's wife—wigs and woolsacks were not in her line; only, if he wished it, she would wish it.

The last two days of his stay the weather changed. Sudden heat burst forth, as it does occasionally for a few hours even in our chilly English spring. The grey-brown bushes and trees started, almost with visible progress, into the tender green shade which is the forerunner of the bursting leaves. The sky was of full cloudless blue. Mr. Wilkins was to come home pretty early from the office, to ride out with his daughter and her lover; but, after waiting some time for him, it grew too late, and they were obliged to give up the project. Nothing would serve Ellinor, then, but that she must carry out a table and have tea in the garden, on the sunny side of the tree, among the roots of which she used to play when a child. Miss Monro objected a little to this caprice of Ellinor's, saying that it was too early for out-of-door meals; but Mr. Corbet overruled all objections, and helped her in her gay preparations. She always kept to the early hours of her childhood, although she, as then, regularly sat with her father at his late dinner; and this meal *al fresco* was to be a reality to her and Miss Monro. There was a place arranged for her father; and she seized upon him, as he was coming from the stable-yard, by the shrubbery path, to his study, and with merry playfulness made him a prisoner, accusing him of disappointing them of their ride, and drawing him, more than half unwilling, to his chair by the table. But he was silent, and almost sad: his presence damped them all; they could hardly tell why, for he did not object to anything, though he seemed to enjoy nothing, and only to force a smile at Ellinor's occasional sallies. These became more and more rare as she perceived her father's depression. She watched him anxiously. He perceived it, and said—shivering in that strange, unaccountable manner which is popularly explained by the expression that some one is passing over the earth that will one day form your grave—

"Ellinor! this is not a day for out-of-door tea. I never felt so chilly a spot in my life. I cannot keep from shaking where I sit. I must leave this place, my dear, in spite of all your good tea."

"Oh, papa! I am so sorry! But look how full the hot sun's rays come on this turf! I thought I had chosen such a capital spot!"

But he got up and persisted in leaving the table, although he was evidently sorry to spoil the little party. He walked up and down the gravel walk, close by them, talking to them as he kept passing by, and trying to cheer them up.

"Are you warmer now, papa?" asked Ellinor.

"Oh, yes; all right! It's only that place that seems so chilly and damp. I'm as warm as a toast now."

The next morning Mr. Corbet left them. The unseasonably fine weather passed away too, and all things went back to their rather grey and dreary aspect; but Ellinor was too happy to feel this much, knowing what absent love existed for her alone, and from this knowledge unconsciously trusting in the sun behind the clouds.

I have said that few or none in the immediate neighbourhood of Hamley, beside their own household and Mr. Ness, knew of Ellinor's engagement. At one of the rare dinner-parties to which she accompanied her father—it was at the old lady's house who chaperoned her to the assemblies—she was taken in to dinner by a young clergyman staying in the neighbourhood. He had just had a small living given to him in his own county, and he felt as if this was a great step in his life. He was good, innocent, and rather boyish in appearance. Ellinor was happy and at her ease, and chatted away to this Mr. Livingstone on many little points of interest which they found they had in common: church music, and the difficulty they had in getting people to sing in parts; Salisbury Cathedral, which they had both seen; styles of church architecture; Ruskin's works; and parish schools, in which Mr. Livingstone was somewhat shocked to find that Ellinor took no great interest. When the gentlemen came

in from the dining-room, it struck Ellinor, for the first time in her life, that her father had taken more wine than was good for him. Indeed, this had rather become a habit with him of late; but, as he always tried to go quietly off to his own room when such had been the case, his daughter had never been aware of it before, and the perception of it now made her cheeks hot with shame. She thought that every one must be as conscious of his altered manner and way of speaking as she was; and, after a pause of sick silence, during which she could not say a word, she set to and talked to Mr. Livingstone about parish schools—anything, with redoubled vigour and apparent interest, in order to keep one or two of the company, at least, from noticing what was to her so painfully obvious.

The effect of her behaviour was far more than she had intended. She kept Mr. Livingstone, it is true, from observing her father; but she also riveted his attention on herself. He had thought her very pretty and agreeable during dinner; but after dinner he considered her bewitching, irresistible. He dreamed of her all night, and wakened up the next morning to a calculation of how far his income would allow him to furnish his pretty new parsonage with that crowning blessing, a wife. For a day or two he did up little sums, and sighed, and thought of Ellinor, her face listening with admiring interest to his sermons, her arm passed into his as they went together round the parish; her sweet voice instructing classes in his schools—turn where he would, in his imagination Ellinor's presence rose up before him.

The consequence was that he wrote an offer, which he found a far more perplexing piece of composition than a sermon: a real hearty expression of love, going on, over all obstacles, to a straightforward explanation of his present prospects and future hopes, and winding up with the information, that on the succeeding morning he would call to know whether he might speak to Mr. Wilkins on the subject of this letter. It was given to Ellinor in the evening, as she was sitting with Miss Monro in the library. Mr. Wilkins

was dining out, she hardly knew where, as it was a sudden engagement, of which he had sent word from the office—a gentlemen's dinner-party, she supposed, as he had dressed in Hamley without coming home. Ellinor turned over the letter when it was brought to her, as some people do when they cannot recognise the handwriting, as if to discover from paper or seal what two moments would assure them of, if they opened the letter and looked at the signature. Ellinor could not guess who had written it by any outward sign; but, the moment she saw the name "Herbert Livingstone," the meaning of the letter flashed upon her, and she coloured all over. She put the letter away, unread, for a few minutes, and then made some excuse for leaving the room and going upstairs. When safe in her bedchamber, she read the young man's eager words with a sense of self-reproach. How must she, engaged to one man, have been behaving to another, if this was the result of a single evening's interview? The self-reproach was unjustly bestowed; but with that we have nothing to do. She made herself very miserable; and at last went down with a heavy heart to go on with Dante, and rummage up words in the dictionary. All the time she seemed to Miss Monro to be plodding on with her Italian more diligently and sedately than usual, she was planning in her own mind to speak to her father as soon as he returned (and he had said that he should not be late), and beg him to undo the mischief she had done by seeing Mr. Livingstone the next morning, and frankly explaining the real state of affairs to him. But she wanted to read her letter again, and think it all over in peace; and so, at an early hour, she wished Miss Monro good-night, and went up into her own room above the drawing-room, overlooking the flower-garden and shrubbery-path to the stable-yard, by which her father was sure to return. She went upstairs and studied her letter well, and tried to recall all her speeches and conduct on that miserable evening—as she thought it then—not knowing what true misery was. Her head ached; and she put out the candle, and went and sat on the window-seat,

looking out into the moonlit garden, watching for her father. She opened the window: partly to cool her forehead, partly to enable her to call down softly when she should see him coming along. By-and-by, the door from the stable-yard into the shrubbery clicked and opened, and in a moment she saw Mr. Wilkins moving through the bushes; but not alone. Mr. Dunster was with him; and the two were talking together in rather excited tones, immediately lost to hearing, however, as they entered Mr. Wilkins's study by the outer door.

"They have been dining together somewhere. Probably at Mr. Hanbury's" (the Hamley brewer), thought Ellinor. "But how provoking that he should have come home with papa, this night of all nights!"

Two or three times before, Mr. Dunster had called on Mr. Wilkins in the evening, as Ellinor knew; but she was not quite aware of the reason for such late visits, and had never put together the two facts—as cause and consequence—that on such occasions her father had been absent from the office all day, and that there might be necessary business for him to transact, the urgency of which was the motive for Mr. Dunster's visits. Mr. Wilkins always seemed to be annoyed by his coming at so late an hour, and spoke of it, resenting the intrusion upon his leisure; and Ellinor, without consideration, adopted her father's mode of speaking and thinking on the subject, and was rather more angry than he was, whenever the obnoxious partner came on business in the evening. This night was, of all nights, the most ill-purposed time (so Ellinor thought) for a *tête-à-tête* with her father! However, there was no doubt in her mind as to what she had to do. So late as it was, the unwelcome visitor could not stop long; and then she would go down and have her little confidence with her father, and beg him to see Mr. Livingstone when he came next morning, and dismiss him as gently as might be.

She sat on in the window-seat, dreaming waking dreams of future happiness. She kept losing herself in such thoughts, and became almost afraid of forgetting why she sat there.

Presently she felt cold, and got up to fetch a shawl, in which she muffled herself and resumed her place. It seemed to her growing very late; the moonlight was coming fuller and fuller into the garden, and the blackness of the shadow was more concentrated and stronger. Surely Mr. Dunster could not have gone away along the dark shrubbery-path so noiselessly but what she must have heard him? No! there was the swell of voices coming up through the window from her father's study: angry voices they were; and her anger rose sympathetically, as she knew that her father was being irritated. There was a sudden movement, as of chairs pushed hastily aside, and then a mysterious unaccountable noise—heavy, sudden; and then a slight movement as of chairs again; and then a profound stillness. Ellinor leaned her head against the side of the window to listen more intently, for some mysterious instinct made her sick and faint. No sound—no noise! Only by-and-by she heard, what we have all heard at such times of intent listening, the beating of the pulses of her heart, and then the whirling rush of blood through her head. How long did this last? She never knew. By-and-by she heard her father's hurried footstep in his bedroom, next to hers; but when she ran thither to speak to him, and ask him what was amiss—if anything had been—if she might come to him now about Mr. Livingstone's letter, she found that he had gone down again to his study, and almost at the same moment she heard the little private outer door of that room open; some one went out, and then there were hurried footsteps along the shrubbery-path. She thought, of course, that it was Mr. Dunster leaving the house; and went back for Mr. Livingstone's letter. Having found it, she passed through her father's room to the private staircase, thinking that, if she went by the more regular way, she would run the risk of disturbing Miss Monro, and perhaps of being questioned in the morning. Even in passing down this remote staircase, she trod softly for fear of being overheard. When she entered the room, the full light of the candles dazzled her for an instant, coming out

of the darkness. They were flaring wildly in the draught that came in through the open door, by which the outer air was admitted; for a moment there seemed no one in the room—and then she saw, with strange sick horror, the legs of some one lying on the carpet behind the table. As if compelled, even while she shrank from doing it, she went round to see who it was that lay there so still and motionless as never to stir at her sudden coming. It was Mr. Dunster; his head propped on chair-cushions, his eyes open, staring, distended. There was a strong smell of brandy and harts-horn in the room; a smell so powerful as not to be neutralised by the free current of night air that blew through the two open doors. Ellinor could not have told whether it was reason or instinct that made her act as she did during this awful night. When afterwards, notwithstanding her shuddering avoidance of it, the haunting memory would come and overshadow her, during many, many years of her life, she grew to believe that the powerful smell of the spilt brandy absolutely intoxicated her—an unconscious Rechabite in practice. But something gave her a presence of mind and a courage not her own. And, though she learnt to think afterwards that she had acted unwisely, if not wrongly and wickedly, yet she marvelled, in recalling that time, how she could have then behaved as she did. First of all she lifted herself up from her fascinated gaze at the dead man, and went to the staircase door, by which she had entered the study, and shut it softly. Then she went back—looked again; took the brandy-bottle, and knelt down, and tried to pour some into the mouth; but this she found she could not do. Then she wetted her handkerchief with the spirit, and moistened the lips; all to no purpose; for, as I have said before, the man was dead—killed by the rupture of a vessel of the brain; how occasioned, I must tell by-and-by. Of course, all Ellinor's little cares and efforts produced no effect; her father had tried them before—vain endeavours all, to bring back the precious breath of life! The poor girl could not bear the look of those open eyes, and softly, tenderly, tried

to close them, although unconscious that, in so doing, she was rendering the pious offices of some beloved hand to a dead man. She was sitting by the body on the floor, when she heard steps coming with rushing and yet cautious tread, through the shrubbery; she had no fear, although it might be the tread of robbers and murderers. The awfulness of the hour raised her above common fears; though she did not go through the usual process of reasoning, and by it feel assured that the feet which were coming so softly and swiftly along were the same which she had heard leaving the room in like manner, only a quarter of an hour before.

Her father entered, and started back, almost upsetting some one behind him by his recoil, on seeing his daughter in her motionless attitude by the dead man.

"My God, Ellinor! what has brought you here?" he said, almost fiercely.

But she answered as one stupefied—

"I don't know. Is he dead?"

"Hush, hush, child; it cannot be helped."

She raised her eyes to the solemn, pitying, awe-stricken face behind her father's—the countenance of Dixon.

"Is he dead?" she asked of him.

The man stepped forwards, respectfully pushing his master on one side as he did so. He bent down over the corpse, and looked, and listened; and then, reaching a candle off the table, he signed Mr. Wilkins to close the door. And Mr. Wilkins obeyed, and looked with an intensity of eagerness almost amounting to faintness on the experiment; and yet he could not hope. The flame was steady—steady and pitilessly unstirred, even when it was adjusted close to mouth and nostril; the head was raised up by one of Dixon's stalwart arms, while he held the candle in the other hand. Ellinor fancied that there was some trembling on Dixon's part, and grasped his wrist tightly, in order to give it the requisite motionless firmness.

All in vain. The head was placed again on the cushions; the servant rose and stood by his master, looked sadly on

the dead man, whom, living, none of them had liked or cared for; and Ellinor sat on, quiet and tearless, as one in a trance.

"How was it, father?" at length she asked.

He would fain have had her ignorant of all; but, so questioned by her lips, so adjured by her eyes, in the very presence of death, he could not choose but speak the truth; he spoke it in convulsive gasps, each sentence an effort—

"He taunted me—he was insolent, beyond my patience—I could not bear it. I struck him—I can't tell how it was. He must have hit his head in falling. Oh, my God! one little hour ago I was innocent of this man's blood!" He covered his face with his hands.

Ellinor took the candle again; kneeling behind Mr. Dunster's head, she tried the futile experiment once more.

"Could not a doctor do some good?" she asked of Dixon, in a hopeless voice.

"No!" said he, shaking his head, and looking with a sidelong glance at his master, who seemed to shrivel up and to shrink away at the bare suggestion. "Doctors can do nought, I'm afeard. All that a doctor could do, I take it, would be to open a vein; and that I could do along with the best of them, if I had but my fleam here." He fumbled in his pockets as he spoke, and, as chance would have it, the "fleam" (or cattle-lancet) was somewhere about his dress. He drew it out, and smoothed and tried it on his finger. Ellinor tried to bare the arm, but turned sick as she did so. Her father started eagerly forwards, and did what was necessary with hurried trembling hands. If they had cared less about the result, they might have been more afraid of the consequences of the operation in the hands of one so ignorant as Dixon. But, vein or artery, it signified little; no living blood gushed out; only a little watery moisture followed the cut of the fleam. They laid him back on his strange, sad death-couch. Dixon spoke next.

"Master Ned!" said he—for he had known Mr. Wilkins in his days of bright careless boyhood, and almost was carried back to them by the sense of charge and protection

which the servant's presence of mind and sharpened senses gave him over his master on this dreary night—"Master Ned! we must do summut."

No one spoke. What was to be done

"Did any folk see him come here?" Dixon asked, after a time. Ellinor looked up to hear her father's answer, a wild hope coming into her mind that all might be concealed somehow; she did not know how, nor did she think of any consequences except saving her father from the vague dread, trouble, and punishment that she was aware would await him, if all were known.

Mr. Wilkins did not seem to hear; in fact, he did not hear anything but the unspoken echo of his own last words, that went booming through his heart: "An hour ago I was innocent of this man's blood! Only an hour ago!"

Dixon got up and poured out half a tumblerful of raw spirit from the brandy-bottle that stood on the table.

"Drink this, Master Ned!" putting it to his master's lips. "Nay"—to Ellinor—"it will do him no harm; only bring back his senses, which, poor gentleman, are scared away. We shall need all our wits. Now, sir, please answer my question! Did any one see Measter Dunster come here?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Wilkins, recovering his speech. "It all seems in a mist. He offered to walk home with me; I did not want him. I was almost rude to him, to keep him off. I did not want to talk of business; I had taken too much wine to be very clear, and some things at the office were not quite in order, and he had found it out. If any one heard our conversation, they must know I did not want him to come with me. Oh! why would he come! He was as obstinate—he would come—and here it has been his death!"

"Well, sir, what's done can't be undone, and I'm sure we'd any of us bring him back to life if we could, even by cutting off our hands, though he was a mighty plaguey chap while he'd breath in him. But what I'm thinking is this: it'll maybe go awkward with you, sir, if he's found here.

One can't say. But don't you think, miss, as he's neither kith nor kin to miss him, we might just bury him away before morning, somewhere? There's better nor four hours of dark. I wish we could put him i' the churchyard, but that can't be; but, to my mind, the sooner we set about digging a place for him to lie in, poor fellow, the better it'll be for us all in the end. I can pare a piece of turf up where it'll never be missed; and, if master 'll take one spade, and I another, why, we'll lay him softly down, and cover him up; and no one 'll be the wiser."

There was no reply from either for a minute or so. Then Mr. Wilkins said—

"If my father could have known of my living to this! Why, they will try me as a criminal; and you, Ellinor! Dixon, you are right. We must conceal it, or I must cut my throat, for I never could live through it. One minute of passion, and my life blasted!"

"Come along, sir," said Dixon; "there's no time to lose." And they went out in search of tools; Ellinor following them, shivering all over, but begging that she might be with them, and not have to remain in the study with——

She would not be bidden into her own room; she dreaded inaction and solitude. She made herself busy with carrying heavy baskets of turf, and straining her strength to the utmost; fetching all that was wanted, with soft swift steps.

Once, as she passed near the open study door, she thought that she heard a rustling, and a flash of hope came across her. Could he be reviving? She entered, but a moment was enough to undeceive her; it had only been a night rustle among the trees. Of hope, life, there was none.

They dug the hole deep and well; working with fierce energy to quench thought and remorse. Once or twice, her father asked for brandy, which Ellinor, reassured by the apparently good effect of the first dose, brought to him without a word; and once, at her father's suggestion, she brought food, such as she could find in the dining-room without disturbing the household, for Dixon.

When all was ready for the reception of the body in its unblessed grave, Mr. Wilkins bade Ellinor go up to her own room—she had done all she could to help them; the rest must be done by them alone. She felt that it must; and, indeed, both her nerves and her bodily strength were giving way. She would have kissed her father, as he sat wearily at the head of the grave—Dixon had gone in to make some arrangement for carrying the corpse—but he pushed her away quietly, but resolutely—

"No, Nelly, you must never kiss me again; I am a murderer."

"But I will, my own darling papa," said she, throwing her arms passionately round his neck, and covering his face with kisses. "I love you, and I don't care what you are—if you were twenty times a murderer, which you are not; I am sure it was only an accident."

"Go in, my child, go in, and try to get some rest! But go in; for we must finish as fast as we can. The moon is down; it will soon be daylight. What a blessing there are no other bed-rooms on this side of the house. Go, Nelly!" And she went; straining herself up to move noiselessly, with eyes averted, through the room which she shuddered at as the place of hasty and unhallowed death.

Once in her own room, she bolted the door on the inside, and then stole to the window, as if some fascination impelled her to watch all the proceedings to the end. But her aching eyes could hardly penetrate through the thick darkness which, at the time of the year of which I am speaking, so closely precedes the dawn. She could discern the tops of the trees against the sky, and could single out the well-known one, at a little distance from the stem of which the grave was made, in the very piece of turf over which so lately she and Ralph had had their merry little tea-making; and where her father, as she now remembered, had shuddered and shivered, as if the ground on which his seat had then been placed was fateful and ominous to him.

Those below moved softly and quietly in all they did; but

every sound had a significant and terrible interpretation to Ellinor's ears. Before they had ended, the little birds had begun to pipe out their gay *reveillé* to the dawn. Then doors closed, and all was profoundly still.

Ellinor threw herself, in her clothes, on the bed, and was thankful for the intense weary physical pain which took off something of the anguish of thought—anguish that she fancied from time to time was leading to insanity.

By-and-by, the morning cold made her instinctively creep between the blankets; and, once there, she fell into a dead heavy sleep.

CHAPTER VII

Ellinor was awakened by a rapping at her door: it was her maid.

She was fully aroused in a moment, for she had fallen asleep with one clearly defined plan in her mind—only one, for all thoughts and cares having no relation to the terrible event were as though they had never been. All her purpose was to shield her father from suspicion. And, to do this, she must control herself—heart, mind, and body must be ruled to this one end.

So she said to Mason—

"Let me lie half-an-hour longer; and beg Miss Monro not to wait breakfast for me; but in half-an-hour bring me up a cup of strong tea, for I have a bad headache."

Mason went away. Ellinor sprang up; rapidly undressed herself, and got into bed again, so that when her maid returned with her breakfast, there was no appearance of the night having been passed in any unusual manner.

"How ill you do look, miss!" said Mason. "I am sure you had better not get up yet."

Ellinor longed to ask if her father had yet shown

himself; but this question—so natural at any other time—seemed to her so suspicious under the circumstances, that she could not bring her lips to frame it. At any rate, she must get up and struggle to make the day like all other days! So she rose, confessing that she did not feel very well, but trying to make light of it and, when she could think of anything but the one awe, to say a trivial sentence or two. But she could not recollect how she behaved in general; for her life hitherto had been simple and led without any consciousness of effect.

Before she was dressed, a message came up to say that Mr. Livingstone was in the drawing-room.

Mr. Livingstone! He belonged to the old life of yesterday! The billows of the night had swept over his mark on the sands of her memory; and it was only by a strong effort that she could remember who he was—what he wanted. She sent Mason down to inquire from the servant who admitted him whom it was that he had asked for.

"He asked for master first. But master has not rung for his water yet, so James told him he was not up. Then he took thought for a while, and asked could he speak to you; he would wait if you were not at liberty, but that he wished particular to see either master, or you. So James asked him to sit down in the drawing-room, and he would let you know."

"I must go," thought Ellinor. "I will send him away directly; to come, thinking of marriage, to a house like this—to-day, too!"

And she went down hastily, and in a hard unsparing mood towards a man, whose affection for her she thought was like a gourd, grown up in a night, and of no account, but as a piece of foolish, boyish excitement.

She never thought of her own appearance—she had dressed without looking in the glass. Her only object was to dismiss her would-be suitor as speedily as possible. All feelings of shyness, awkwardness, or maiden modesty, were quenched and overcome. In she went.

He was standing by the mantelpiece as she entered. He made a step or two forward to meet her, and then stopped—petrified, as it were, at the sight of her hard white face.

"Miss Wilkins, I am afraid you are ill! I have come too early. But I have to leave Hamley in half-an-hour, and I thought—— Oh, Miss Wilkins! what have I done?"

For she sank into the chair nearest to her, as if overcome by his words; but, indeed, it was by the oppression of her own thoughts: she was hardly conscious of his presence.

He came a step or two nearer, as if he longed to take her in his arms and comfort and shelter her; but she stiffened herself and arose, and by an effort walked towards the fireplace, and there stood, as if awaiting what he would say next. But he was overwhelmed by her aspect of illness. He almost forgot his own wishes, his own suit, in his desire to relieve her from the pain, physical as he believed it, under which she was suffering. It was she who had to begin the subject.

"I received your letter yesterday, Mr. Livingstone. I was anxious to see you to-day, in order that I might prevent you from speaking to my father. I do not say anything of the kind of affection you can feel for me—me, whom you have only seen once. All I shall say is, that the sooner we both forget what I must call folly, the better."

She took the airs of a woman considerably older and more experienced than himself. He thought her haughty; she was only miserable.

"You are mistaken," said he, more quietly and with more dignity than was likely from his previous conduct. "I will not allow you to characterise as folly what might be presumptuous on my part—I had no business to express myself so soon—but what in its foundation was true and sincere. That I can answer for most solemnly. It is possible, though it may not be a usual thing, for a man to feel so strongly attracted by the charms and qualities of a woman, even at first sight, as to feel sure that she, and she alone, can make his happiness. My folly consisted—there you are

right—in even dreaming that you could return my feelings in the slightest degree, when you had only seen me once; and I am most truly ashamed of myself. I cannot tell you how sorry I am, when I see how you have compelled yourself to come and speak to me when you are so ill."

She staggered into a chair; for, with all her wish for his speedy dismissal, she was obliged to be seated. His hand was upon the bell.

"No, don't!" she said. "Wait a minute."

His eyes, bent upon her with a look of deep anxiety, touched her at that moment, and she was on the point of shedding tears; but she checked herself, and rose again.

"I will go," said he. "It is the kindest thing I can do. Only, may I write! May I venture to write and urge what I have to say more coherently?"

"No!" said she. "Don't write. I have given you my answer. We are nothing, and can be nothing, to each other. I am engaged to be married. I should not have told you, if you had not been so kind. Thank you. But go now."

The poor young man's face fell, and he became almost as white as she was, for the instant. After a moment's reflection, he took her hand in his, and said—

"May God bless you, and him too, whoever he be! But, if you want a friend, I may be that friend, may I not? and try to prove that my words of regard are true, in a better and higher sense than I used them at first." And, kissing her passive hand, he was gone; and she was left sitting alone.

But solitude was not what she could bear. She went quickly upstairs, and took a strong dose of sal-volatile, even while she heard Miss Monro calling to her.

"My dear, who was that gentleman that has been closeted with you in the drawing-room all this time?"

And then, without listening to Ellinor's reply, she went on—

"Mrs. Jackson has been here" (it was at Mrs. Jackson's house that Mr. Dunster lodged), "wanting to know if we

could tell her where Mr. Dunster was, for he never came home last night at all. And you were in the drawing-room with—who did you say he was?—that Mr. Livingstone, who might have come at a better time to bid good-bye; and he had never dined here, had he? so I don't see any reason he had to come calling, and P. P. C.-ing, and your papa *not* up. So I said to Mrs. Jackson, 'I'll send and ask Mr. Wilkins, if you like; but I don't see any use in it, for I can tell you just as well as anybody, that Mr. Dunster is not in this house, wherever he may be.' Yet nothing would satisfy her but that some one must go and waken up your papa, and ask if he could tell where Mr. Dunster was."

"And did papa?" inquired Ellinor, her dry throat huskily forming the inquiry that seemed to be expected from her.

"No! to be sure not. How should Mr. Wilkins know? As I said to Mrs. Jackson, 'Mr. Wilkins is not likely to know where Mr. Dunster spends his time when he is not in the office, for they do not move in the same rank of life, my good woman'; and Mrs. Jackson apologised, but said that yesterday they had both been dining at Mr. Hodgson's together, she believed; and somehow she had got it into her head that Mr. Dunster might have missed his way in coming along Moore Lane, and might have slipped into the canal; so she just thought she would step up and ask Mr. Wilkins if they had left Mr. Hodgson's together, or if your papa had driven home. I asked her why she had not told me all these particulars before, for I could have asked your papa myself all about when he last saw Mr. Dunster; and I went up to ask him a second time; but he did not like it at all, for he was busy dressing, and I had to shout my questions through the door, and he could not always hear me at first."

"What did he say?"

"Oh! he had walked part of the way with Mr. Dunster, and then cut across by the short path through the fields, as far as I could understand him through the door. He seemed very much annoyed to hear that Mr. Dunster had not been at home all night; but he said I was to tell Mrs. Jackson

that he would go to the office as soon as he had had his breakfast, which he ordered to be sent up directly into his own room, and he had no doubt it would all turn out right; but that she had better go home at once. And, as I told her, she might find Mr. Dunster there by the time she got there. There, there is your papa going out! He has not lost any time over his breakfast!"

Ellinor had taken up the *Hamley Examiner*, a daily paper, which lay on the table, to hide her face in the first instance; but it served a second purpose, as she glanced languidly over the columns of the advertisements.

"Oh! here are Colonel Macdonald's orchideous plants to be sold! All the stock of hothouse and stove plants at Hartwell Priory! I must send James over to Hartwell to attend the sale. It is to last for three days."

"But can he be spared for so long?"

"Oh, yes; he had better stay at the little inn there, to be on the spot. Three days," and as she spoke, she ran out to the gardener, who was sweeping up the newly-mown grass in the front of the house. She gave him hasty and unlimited directions, only seeming intent—if any one had been suspiciously watching her words and actions—to hurry him off to the distant village, where the auction was to take place.

When he was once gone, she breathed more freely. Now, no one but the three cognisant of the terrible reason of the disturbance of the turf under the trees in a certain spot in the belt round the flower-garden, would be likely to go into the place. Miss Monro might wander round with a book in her hand; but she never noticed anything, and was short-sighted into the bargain. Three days of this moist, warm, growing weather, and the green grass would spring, just as if life—was what it had been twenty-four hours before.

When all this was done and said, it seemed as if Ellinor's strength and spirit sank down at once. Her voice became feeble, her aspect wan; and, although she told Miss Monro that nothing was the matter, yet it was impossible for any one who loved her not to perceive that she was far from well.

The kind governess placed her pupil on the sofa, covered her feet up warmly, darkened the room, and then stole out on tiptoe, fancying that Ellinor would sleep. Her eyes were, indeed, shut; but, try as much as she would to be quiet, she was up in less than five minutes after Miss Monro had left the room, and walking up and down in all the restless agony of body that arises from an overstrained mind. But soon Miss Monro reappeared, bringing with her a dose of soothing medicine of her own concocting, for she was great in domestic quackery. What the medicine was Ellinor did not care to know; she drank it without any sign of her usual merry resistance to physic of Miss Monro's ordering; and, as the latter took up a book, and showed a set purpose of remaining with her patient, Ellinor was compelled to lie still, and presently fell asleep.

She awakened late in the afternoon with a start. Her father was standing over her, listening to Miss Monro's account of her indisposition. She only caught one glimpse of his strangely altered countenance, and hid her head in the cushions—hid it from memory, not from him. For in an instant she must have conjectured the interpretation he was likely to put upon her shrinking action, and she turned towards him, and had thrown her arms round his neck, and was kissing his cold, passive face. Then she fell back. But all this time their sad eyes never met—they dreaded the look of recollection that must be in each other's gaze.

"There, my dear!" said Miss Monro. "Now you must lie still till I fetch you a little broth. You are better now, are not you?"

"You need not go for the broth, Miss Monro," said Mr. Wilkins, ringing the bell. "Fletcher can surely bring it." He dreaded the being left alone with his daughter—nor did she fear it less. She heard the strange alteration in her father's voice, hard and hoarse, as if it was an effort to speak. The physical signs of his suffering cut her to the heart; and yet she wondered how it was that they could both be alive, or that, if alive, they were not rending their garments

and crying aloud. Mr. Wilkins seemed to have lost the power of careless action and speech, it is true. He wished to leave the room, now his anxiety about his daughter was relieved, but hardly knew how to set about it. He was obliged to think about the veriest trifle, in order that by an effort of reason he might understand how he should have spoken or acted if he had been free from blood-guiltiness. Ellinor understood all by intuition. But henceforward the unspoken comprehension of each other's hidden motions made their mutual presence a burdensome anxiety to each. Miss Monro was a relief; they were glad of her as a third person, unconscious of the secret which constrained them. This afternoon her unconsciousness gave present pain, although on after reflection each found in her speeches a cause of rejoicing.

"And Mr. Dunster, Mr. Wilkins, has he come home yet?"

A moment's pause, in which Mr. Wilkins pumped the words out of his husky throat—

"I have not heard. I have been riding. I went on business to Mr. Estcourt's. Perhaps you will be so kind as to send and inquire at Mrs. Jackson's."

Ellinor sickened at the words. She had been all her life a truthful, plain-spoken girl. She held herself high above deceit. Yet, here came the necessity for deceit—a snare spread around her. She had not revolted so much from the deed which brought unpremeditated death, as she did from these words of her father's. The night before, in her mad fever of affright, she had fancied that to conceal the body was all that would be required; she had not looked forward to the long, weary course of small lies, to be done and said, involved in that one mistaken action. Yet, while her father's words made her soul revolt, his appearance melted her heart, as she caught it, half turned away from her, neither looking straight at Miss Monro, nor at anything materially visible. His hollow, sunken eye seemed to Ellinor to have a vision of the dead man before it. His cheek was livid and worn, and

its healthy colouring, gained by years of hearty outdoor exercise, was all gone into the wanness of age. His hair, even to Ellinor, seemed greyer for the past night of wretchedness. He stooped, and looked dreamily earthward, where formerly he had stood erect. It needed all the pity called forth by such observation to quench Ellinor's passionate contempt for the course on which she and her father were embarked, when she heard him repeat his words to the servant who came with her broth.

"Fletcher! go to Mrs. Jackson's and inquire if Mr. Dunster is come home yet. I want to speak to him."

"To him!" lying dead where he had been laid; killed by the man who now asked for his presence! Ellinor shut her eyes, and lay back in despair. She wished she might die, and be out of this horrible tangle of events.

Two minues after, she was conscious of her father and Miss Monro stealing softly out of the room. They thought that she slept.

She sprang off the sofa and knelt down.

"O God," she prayed, "Thou knowest! Help me! There is none other help but Thee!"

I suppose she fainted. For, an hour or more afterwards, Miss Monro, coming in, found her lying insensible by the side of the sofa.

She was carried to bed. She was not delirious; she was only in a stupor, which they feared might end in delirium. To obviate this, her father sent far and wide for skilful physicians, who tended her, almost at the rate of a guinea the minute.

People said how hard it was upon Mr. Wilkins, that, scarcely had that wretch Dunster gone off, with no one knows how much out of the trusts of the firm, before his only child fell ill. And, to tell the truth, he himself looked burnt and seared with affliction. He had a startled look, they said, as if he never could tell, after such experience, from which side the awful proofs of the uncertainty of earth would appear, the terrible phantoms of unforeseen dread.

Both rich and poor, town and country, sympathised with him. The rich cared not to press their claims, or their business, at such a time, and only wondered, in the superficial talk after dinner, how such a good fellow as Wilkins could ever have been deceived by a man like Dunster. Even Sir Frank Holster and his lady forgot their old quarrel, and came to inquire after Ellinor, and sent her hothouse-fruit by the bushel.

Mr. Corbet behaved as an anxious lover should do. He wrote daily to Miss Monro, to beg for the most minute bulletins; he procured everything in town that any doctor even fancied might be of service. He came down, as soon as there was the slightest hint of permission that Ellinor might see him. He overpowered her with tender words and caresses, till at last she shrank away from them, as from something too bewildering and past all right comprehension.

But one night before this, when all windows and doors stood open to admit the least breath that stirred the sultry July air, a servant on velvet tiptoe had stolen up to Ellinor's open door, and had beckoned out of the chamber the ever-watchful nurse, Miss Munro.

"A gentleman wants you," were all the words the housemaid dared to say so close to the bedroom. And softly, softly Miss Monro stepped down the stairs, into the drawing-room; and there she saw Mr. Livingstone. But she did not know him; she had never seen him before.

"I have travelled all day. I heard she was ill—was dying. May I just have one more look at her? I will not speak; I will hardly breathe. Only let me see her once again!"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I don't know who you are; and if you mean Miss Wilkins by 'her,' she is very ill, but we hope not dying. She was very ill, indeed, yesterday; very dangerously ill, I may say, but she is having a good sleep, in consequence of a soporific medicine, and we are really beginning to hope"——

But just here Miss Monro's hand was taken, and, to her

infinite surprise, was kissed before she could remember how improper such behaviour was.

"God bless you, madam, for saying so! But, if she sleeps, will you let me see her? it can do no harm, for I will tread as if on egg-shells; and I have come so far—if I might just look on her sweet face! Pray, madam, let me just have one sight of her; I will not ask for more."

But he did ask for more, after he had had his wish. He stole upstairs after Miss Monro, who looked round reproachfully at him if even a nightingale sang, or an owl hooted, in the trees outside the open windows, yet who paused to say herself, outside Mr. Wilkins's chamber door—

"Her father's room; he has not been in bed for six nights, till to-night; pray do not make a noise to waken him!" And on into the deep stillness of the hushed room, where one clear ray of hidden lamplight shot athwart the floor, where a watcher, breathing softly, sat beside the bed—where Ellinor's dark head lay motionless on the white pillow, her face almost as white, her form almost as still. You might have heard a pin fall. After a while, he moved to withdraw. Miss Monro, jealous of every sound, followed him, with steps all the more heavy because they were taken with so much care, down the stairs, back into the drawing-room. By the bed-candle flaring in the draught, she saw that there was the glittering mark of wet tears on his cheek; and she felt, as she said afterwards, "sorry for the young man." And yet she urged him to go, for she knew that she might be wanted upstairs. He took her hand, and wrung it hard.

"Thank you! She looked so changed—oh! she looked as though she were dead. You will write—Herbert Livingstone, Langham Vicarage, Yorkshire; you will promise me to write? If I could do anything for her—but I can but pray. Oh, my darling; my darling! and I have no right to be with her!"

"Go away, there's a good young man," said Miss Monro, all the more pressing to hurry him out by the front-door,

because she was afraid of his emotion overmastering him, and making him noisy in his demonstrations. "Yes, I will write; I will write, never fear!" and she bolted the door behind him, and was thankful.

Two minutes afterwards there was a low tap; she undid the fastenings, and there he stood, pale in the moonlight.

"Please don't tell her I came to ask about her; she might not like it."

"No, no! not I! Poor creature, she's not likely to care to hear anything this long while. She never roused at Mr. Corbet's name."

"Mr. Corbet's!" said Livingstone, below his breath, and he turned and went away; this time for good.

But Ellinor recovered. She knew she was recovering, when day after day she felt involuntary strength and appetite return. Her body seemed stronger than her will; for that would have induced her to creep into her grave, and shut her eyes for ever on this world, so full of troubles.

She lay, for the most part, with her eyes closed, very still and quiet; but she thought with the intensity of one who seeks for lost peace, and cannot find it. She began to see that, if, in the mad impulses of that mad nightmare of horror, they had all strengthened each other and dared to be frank and open, confessing a great fault, a greater disaster, a greater woe—which in the first instance was hardly a crime—their future course, though sad and sorrowful, would have been a simple and straightforward one to tread. But it was not for her to undo what was done, and to reveal the error and shame of a father. Only she, turning anew to God, in the solemn and quiet watches of the night, made a covenant, that in her conduct, her own personal individual life, she would act loyally and truthfully. And as for the future, and all the terrible chances involved in it, she would leave it in His hands—if, indeed (and here came in the Tempter), He would watch over one whose life hereafter must seem based upon a lie. Her only plea, offered "standing afar-off," was, "The lie is said and done and over—it

was not for my own sake. Can filial piety be so overcome by the rights of justice and truth, as to demand of me that I should reveal my father's guilt?"

Her father's severe sharp punishment began. He knew why she suffered, what made her young strength falter and tremble, what made her life seem nigh about to be quenched in death. Yet he could not take his sorrow and care in the natural manner. He was obliged to think how every word and deed would be construed. He fancied that people were watching him with suspicious eyes, when nothing was further from their thoughts. For, once let the "public" of any place be possessed by an idea, it is more difficult to dislodge it than any one imagines who has not tried. If Mr. Wilkins had gone into the Hamley market-place, and proclaimed himself guilty of the manslaughter of Mr. Dunster—nay, if he had detailed all the circumstances—the people would have exclaimed, "Poor man, he is crazed by this discovery of the unworthiness of the man he trusted so; and no wonder—it was such a thing to have done—to have defrauded his partner to such an extent, and then have made off to America!"

For many small circumstances, which I do not stop to detail here, went far to prove this, as we know, unfounded supposition; and Mr. Wilkins, who was known, from his handsome boyhood, through his comely manhood, up to the present time, by all the people in Hamley, was an object of sympathy and respect to every one who saw him, as he passed by, old, and lorn, and haggard before his time, all through the evil conduct of one, London-bred, who was as a hard, unlovely stranger to the popular mind of this little country town.

Mr. Wilkins's own servants liked him. The workings of his temptations were such as they could understand. If he had been hot-tempered, he had also been generous, or I should rather say careless and lavish with his money. And, now that he was cheated and impoverished by his partner's delinquency, they thought it no wonder that he drank long and deep in the solitary evenings which he passed at home.

It was not that he was without invitations. Every one came forward to testify their respect for him by asking him to their houses. He had probably never been so universally popular since his father's death. But, as he said, he did not care to go into society while his daughter was so ill—he had no spirits for company.

But, if any one had cared to observe his conduct at home, and to draw conclusions from it, they could have noticed that, anxious as he was about Ellinor, he rather avoided than sought her presence, now that her consciousness and memory were restored. Nor did she ask for, or wish for him. The presence of each was a burden to the other. Oh, sad and woeful night of May—overshadowing the coming summer months with gloom and bitter remorse!

CHAPTER VIII

Still, youth prevailed over all. Ellinor got well, as I have said, even when she would fain have died. And the afternoon came when she left her room. Miss Monro would gladly have made a festival of her recovery, and have had her conveyed into the unused drawing-room. But Ellinor begged that she might be taken into the library—into the school-room—anywhere (thought she) not looking on the flower-garden side of the house, which she had felt in all her illness as a ghastly pressure lying within sight of those very windows, through which the morning-sun streamed right upon her bed—like the accusing angel, bringing all hidden things to light.

And when Ellinor was better still, when the bath-chair had been sent up for her use, by some kindly old maid, out of Hamley, she still petitioned that it might be kept on the lawn- or town-side of the house, away from the flower-garden.

One day she almost screamed, when, as she was going to the front door, she saw Dixon standing ready to draw her, instead of Fletcher, the servant who usually went. But she checked all demonstration of feeling; although it was the first time she had seen him since he and she and one more had worked their hearts out in hard bodily labour.

He looked so stern and ill! Cross, too, which she had never seen him before.

As soon as they were out of immediate sight of the windows, she asked him to stop, forcing herself to speak to him.

"Dixon, you look very poorly," she said, trembling as she spoke.

"Ay!" said he. "We didn't think much of it at the time, did we, Miss Nelly? But it'll be the death on us, I'm thinking. It has aged me above a bit. All my fifty years afore were but as a forenoon of child's play to that night. Measter, too—I could a-bear a good deal; but measter cuts through the stable-yard, and past me, wi'out a word, as if I was poison, or a stinking foumart. It's that as is worst, Miss Nelly, it is."

And the poor man brushed some tears from his eyes with the back of his withered, furrowed hand. Ellinor caught the infection, and cried outright, sobbed like a child, even while she held out her little white thin hand to his grasp. For as soon as he saw her emotion, he was penitent for what he had said.

"Don't now—don't," was all he could think of to say.

"Dixon!" said she at length, "you must not mind it. You must try not to mind it. I see he does not like to be reminded of that, even by seeing me. He tries never to be alone with me. My poor old Dixon, it has spoilt my life for me; for I don't think he loves me any more."

She sobbed as if her heart would break; and now it was Dixon's turn to be comforter.

"Ah, dear, my blessing, he loves you above everything. It's only he can't a-bear the sight of us, as is but natural.

And, if he doesn't fancy being alone with you, there's always one as does, and that's a comfort at the worst of times. And don't ye fret about what I said a minute ago! I were put out, because measter all but pushed me out of his way this morning, without never a word. But I were an old fool for telling ye. And I've really forgotten why I told Fletcher I'd drag ye a bit about to-day. Th' gardener is beginning for to wonder as you don't want to see th' annuals and bedding-out things as you were so particular about in May. And I thought I'd just have a word wi' ye; and then, if you'd let me, we'd go together just once round the flower-garden, just to say you've been, you know, and to give them chaps a bit of praise. You'll only have to look on the beds, my pretty, and it must be done some time. So come along!"

He began to pull resolutely in the direction of the flower-garden. Ellinor bit her lips to keep in the cry of repugnance that rose to them. As Dixon stopped to unlock the door, he said—

"It's not hardness, nothing like it; I've waited till I heerd you were better; but it's in for a penny, in for a pound, wi' us all; and folk may talk; and, bless your little brave heart, you'll stand a deal for your father's sake, and so will I; though I do feel it above a bit, when he puts out his hand as if to keep me off, and I only going to speak to him about Clipper's knees; though I'll own I had wondered many a day when I was to have the good-morrow master never missed sin' he were a boy till —— Well! and now you've seen the beds, and can say they looked mighty pretty, and all is done as you wished; and we're got out again, and breathing fresher air than yon sun-baked hole, with its smelling flowers, not half so wholesome to snuff at as good stable-dung."

So the good man chatted on; not without the purpose of giving Ellinor time to recover herself; and partly also to drown his own cares, which lay heavier on his heart than he could say. But he thought himself rewarded by Ellinor's

thanks and warm pressure of his hard hand, as she got out at the front door, and bade him good-bye.

The break to her days of weary monotony was the letters she constantly received from Mr. Corbet. And yet here again lurked the sting. He was all astonishment and indignation at Mr. Dunster's disappearance, or rather flight, to America. And, now that she was growing stronger, he did not scruple to express curiosity respecting the details, never doubting but that she was perfectly acquainted with much that he wanted to know; although he had too much delicacy to question her on the point which was most important of all in his eyes, namely, how far it had affected Mr. Wilkins's worldly prospects; for the report prevalent in Hamley had reached London, that Mr. Dunster had made away with, or carried off, trust property to a considerable extent, for all which Mr. Wilkins would of course be liable.

It was hard work for Ralph Corbet to keep from seeking direct information on this head from Mr. Ness, or, indeed, from Mr. Wilkins himself. But he restrained himself, knowing that in August he should be able to make all these inquiries personally. Before the end of the long vacation he had hoped to marry Ellinor: that was the time which had been planned by them when they had met in the early spring, before her illness and all this misfortune happened. But now, as he wrote to his father, nothing could be definitely arranged until he had paid his visit to Hamley, and seen the state of affairs.

Accordingly, one Saturday in August he came to Ford Bank, this time as a visitor to Ellinor's home, instead of to his old quarters at Mr. Ness's.

The house was still as if asleep in the full heat of the afternoon sun, as Mr. Corbet drove up. The window-blinds were down; the front door wide open, great stands of heliotrope and roses and geraniums stood just within the shadow of the hall; but through all the silence his approach seemed to excite no commotion. He thought it strange that he had not been watched for, that Ellinor did not come running out

to meet him, that she allowed Fletcher to come and attend to his luggage, and usher him into the library just like any common visitor, any morning-caller. He stiffened himself up into a moment's indignant coldness of manner. But it vanished in an instant when, on the door being opened, he saw Ellinor standing, holding by the table, looking for his appearance with almost panting anxiety. He thought of nothing then but her evident weakness, her changed looks, for which no account of her illness had prepared him. For she was deadly white, lips and all; and her dark eyes seemed unnaturally enlarged, while the caves in which they were set were strangely deep and hollow. Her hair, too, had been cut off pretty closely; she did not usually wear a cap, but, with some faint idea of making herself look better in his eyes, she had put on one this day, and the effect was that she seemed to be forty years of age; but one instant after he had come in, her pale face was flooded with crimson, and her eyes were full of tears. She had hard work to keep herself from going into hysterics; but she instinctively knew how much he would hate a scene, and she checked herself in time.

"Oh," she murmured, "I am so glad to see you; it is such a comfort, such an infinite pleasure." And so she went on, cooing out words over him, and stroking his hair with her thin fingers; while he rather tried to avert his eyes, he was so much afraid of betraying how much he thought her altered.

But when she came down, dressed for dinner, this sense of her change was diminished to him. Her short brown hair had already a little wave, and was ornamented by some black lace; she wore a large black lace shawl—it had been her mother's of old—over some delicate-coloured muslin dress; her face was slightly flushed, and had the tints of a wild rose; her lips kept pale and trembling with involuntary motion, it is true; and, as the lovers stood together, hand in hand, by the window, he was aware of a little convulsive twitching at every noise, even while she seemed gazing in

tranquil pleasure on the long smooth slope of the newly-mown lawn, stretching down to the little brook that prattled merrily over the stones on its merry course to Hamley town.

He felt a stronger twitch than ever before; even while his ear, less delicate than hers, could distinguish no peculiar sound. About two minutes after Mr. Wilkins entered the room. He came up to Mr. Corbet with a warm welcome: some of it real, some of it assumed. He talked volubly to him, taking little or no notice of Ellinor, who dropped into the background, and sat down on the sofa by Miss Monro; for on this day they were all to dine together. Ralph Corbet thought that Mr. Wilkins was aged; but no wonder, after all his anxiety of various kinds: Mr. Dunster's flight and reported defalcations, and Ellinor's illness, of the seriousness of which her lover was now convinced by her appearance.

He would fain have spoken more to her during the dinner that ensued; but Mr. Wilkins absorbed all his attention, talking and questioning on subjects that left the ladies out of the conversation almost perpetually. Mr. Corbet recognised his host's fine tact, even while his persistence in talking annoyed him. He was quite sure that Mr. Wilkins was anxious to spare his daughter any exertion beyond that—to which, indeed, she seemed scarcely equal—of sitting at the head of the table. And the more her father talked—so fine an observer was Mr. Corbet—the more silent and depressed Ellinor appeared. But, by-and-by, he accounted for this inverse ratio of gaiety, as he perceived how quickly Mr. Wilkins had his glass replenished. And here, again, Mr. Corbet drew his conclusions, from the silent way in which, without a word or sign from his master, Fletcher gave him more wine continually—wine that was drained off at once.

"Six glasses of sherry before dessert," thought Mr. Corbet to himself. "Bad habit—no wonder Ellinor looks grave." And, when the gentlemen were left alone, Mr. Wilkins helped himself even still more freely; yet without the slightest effect on the clearness and brilliancy of his

conversation. He had always talked well and racily, that Ralph knew, and in this power he now recognised a temptation to which he feared that his future father-in-law had succumbed. And yet, while he perceived that this gift led into temptation, he coveted it for himself; for he was perfectly aware that this fluency, this happy choice of epithets, was the one thing he should fail in when he began to enter into the more active career of his profession. But after some time spent in listening and admiring, with this little feeling of envy lurking in the background, Mr. Corbet became aware of Mr. Wilkins's increasing confusion of ideas, and rather unnatural merriment; and, with a sudden revulsion from admiration to disgust, he rose up to go into the library, where Ellinor and Miss Monro were sitting. Mr. Wilkins accompanied him, laughing and talking somewhat loudly. Was Ellinor aware of her father's state? Of that Mr. Corbet could not be sure. She looked up with grave sad eyes as they came into the room, but with no apparent sensation of surprise, annoyance, or shame. When her glance met her father's Mr. Corbet noticed that it seemed to sober the latter immediately. He sat down near the open window, and did not speak, but sighed heavily from time to time. Miss Monro took up a book, in order to leave the young people to themselves; and, after a little low-murmured conversation, Ellinor went upstairs to put on her things for a stroll through the meadows by the river-side.

They were some time sauntering along in the lovely summer twilight, now resting on some grassy hedgerow bank, now standing still, looking at the great barges, with their crimson sails, lazily floating down the river, making ripples on the glassy opal surface of the water. They did not talk very much; Ellinor seemed disinclined for the exertion; and her lover was thinking over Mr. Wilkins's behaviour, with some surprise and distaste of the habit so evidently growing upon him.

They came home, looking serious and tired; yet they could not account for their fatigue by the length of their

walk, and Miss Monro, forgetting Autolycus's song, kept fidgeting about Ellinor, and wondering how it was she looked so pale, if she had only been as far as the Ash Meadow. To escape from this wonder, Ellinor went early to bed. Mr. Wilkins was gone, no one knew where, and Ralph and Miss Monro were left to a half-hour's *tête-à-tête*. He thought he could easily account for Ellinor's languor, if, indeed, she had perceived as much as he had done of her father's state, when they had come into the library after dinner. But there were many details which he was anxious to hear from a comparatively indifferent person; and, as soon as he could, he passed on from the conversation about Ellinor's health, to inquiries as to the whole affair of Mr. Dunster's disappearance.

Next to her anxiety about Ellinor, Miss Monro liked to dilate on the mystery connected with Mr. Dunster's flight; for that was the word she employed without hesitation, as she gave Ralph the account of the event universally received and believed in by the people of Hamley. How Mr. Dunster had never been liked by any one; how everybody remembered that he could never look them straight in the face; how he always seemed to be hiding something that he did not want to have known; how he had drawn a large sum (exact quantity unknown) out of the county-bank only the day before he left Hamley, doubtless in preparation for his escape; how some one had told Mr. Wilkins he had seen a man just like Dunster lurking about the docks at Liverpool, about two days after he had left his lodgings, but that this some one, being in a hurry, had not cared to stop and speak to the man; how that the affairs in the office were discovered to be in such a sad state that it was no wonder that Mr. Dunster had absconded—he that had been so trusted by poor dear Mr. Wilkins. Money gone no one knew how or where.

"But has he no friends who can explain his proceedings, and account for the missing money, in some way?" asked Mr. Corbet.

"No, none. Mr. Wilkins has written everywhere, right and left, I believe. I know he had a letter from Mr. Dunster's nearest relation—a tradesman in the City—a cousin, I think, and he could give no information in any way. He knew that about ten years ago Mr. Dunster had had a great fancy for going to America, and had read a great many travels—all just what a man would do before going off to a country."

"Ten years is a long time beforehand," said Mr. Corbet, half-smiling; "—shows malice prepense with a vengeance." But then, turning grave, he said, "Did he leave Hamley in debt?"

"No; I never heard of that," said Miss Monro, rather unwillingly; for she considered it as a piece of loyalty to the Wilkinses, whom Mr. Dunster had injured (as she thought), to blacken his character as much as was consistent with any degree of truth.

"It is a strange story," said Mr. Corbet, musing.

"Not at all," she replied quickly; "I am sure, if you had seen the man, with one or two side-locks of hair combed over his baldness, as if he were ashamed of it, and his eyes that never looked at you, and his way of eating with his knife when he thought he was not observed—oh, and numbers of things!—you would not think it strange."

Mr. Corbet smiled.

"I only meant that he seems to have had no extravagant or vicious habits which would account for his embezzlement of the money that is missing—but, to be sure, money in itself is a temptation—only he, being a partner, was in a fair way of making it without risk to himself. Has Mr. Wilkins taken any steps to have him arrested in America? He might easily do that."

"Oh, my dear Mr. Ralph, you don't know our good Mr. Wilkins! He would rather bear the loss, I am sure, and all this trouble and care which it has brought upon him, than be revenged upon Mr. Dunster."

"Revenged! What nonsense! it is simple justice—justice to himself and to others—to see that villainy is so

sufficiently punished as to deter others from entering upon such courses. But I have little doubt Mr. Wilkins has taken the right steps; he is not the man to sit down quietly under such a loss."

"No, indeed! He had him advertised in the *Times* and in the county papers, and offered a reward of twenty pounds for information concerning him."

"Twenty pounds was too little."

"So I said. I told Ellinor that I would give twenty pounds myself to have him apprehended, and she, poor darling! fell a-trembling, and said, 'I would give all I have —I would give my life.' And then she was in such distress, and sobbed so, I promised her I would never name it to her again."

"Poor child—poor child! she wants change of scene. Her nerves have been sadly shaken by her illness."

The next day was Sunday; Ellinor was to go to church for the first time since her illness. Her father had decided it for her, or else she would fain have stayed away—she would hardly acknowledge why, even to herself; but it seemed to her as if the very words and presence of God must there search her and find her out.

She went early, leaning on the arm of her lover, and trying to forget the past in the present. They walked slowly along between the rows of waving golden corn ripe for the harvest. Mr. Corbet gathered blue and scarlet flowers, and made up a little rustic nosegay for her. She took and stuck it in her girdle, smiling faintly as she did so.

Hamley Church had, in former days, been collegiate, and was, in consequence, much larger and grander than the majority of country-town churches. The Ford Bank pew was a square one, downstairs; the Ford Bank servants sat in a front pew in the gallery, right before their master. Ellinor was "hardening her heart" not to listen, not to hearken to what might disturb the wound which was just being skinned over, when she caught Dixon's face up above. He looked worn, sad, soured, and anxious to a miserable

degree; but he was straining eyes and ears, heart and soul, to hear the solemn words read from the pulpit, as if in them alone he could find help in his strait. Ellinor felt rebuked and humbled.

She was in a tumultuous state of mind when they left church; she wished to do her duty, yet could not ascertain what it was. Who was to help her with wisdom and advice? Assuredly he to whom her future life was to be trusted! But the case must be stated in an impersonal form. No one, not even her husband, must ever know anything against her father from her. Ellinor was so artless herself, that she had little idea how quickly and easily some people can penetrate motives, and combine disjointed sentences. She began to speak to Ralph on their slow, sauntering walk homewards through the quiet meadows.

"Suppose, Ralph, that a girl was engaged to be married"——

"I can very easily suppose that, with you by me," said he, filling up her pause.

"Oh! but I don't mean myself at all," replied she, reddening. "I am only thinking of what might happen; and suppose that this girl knew of some one belonging to her—we will call it a brother—who had done something wrong, that would bring disgrace upon the whole family if it was known—though, indeed, it might not have been so very wrong as it seemed, and as it would look to the world—ought she to break off her engagement for fear of involving her lover in the disgrace?"

"Certainly not, without telling him her reason for doing so."

"Ah! but suppose she could not. She might not be at liberty to do so."

"I can't answer supposititious cases. I must have the facts—if facts there are—more plainly before me, if I am to give an opinion. Whom are you thinking of, Ellinor?" asked he rather abruptly.

"Oh, of no one," she answered in affright. "Why should

I be thinking of any one? I often try to plan out what I should do, or what I ought to do, if such and such a thing happened, just as you recollect I used to wonder if I should have presence of mind in case of fire."

"Then, after all, you yourself are the girl who is engaged, and who has the imaginary brother who gets into disgrace?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said she, a little annoyed at having betrayed any personal interest in the affair.

He was silent, meditating.

"There is nothing wrong in it," said she timidly, "is there?"

"I think you had better tell me fully out what is in your mind," he replied kindly. "Something has happened which has suggested these questions. Are you putting yourself in the place of any one about whom you have been hearing lately? I know you used to do so formerly, when you were a little girl."

"No; it was a very foolish question of mine, and I ought not to have said anything about it. See! here is Mr. Ness overtaking us."

The clergyman joined them on the broad walk that ran by the river-side, and the talk became general. It was a relief to Ellinor, who had not attained her end, but who had gone far towards betraying something of her own individual interest in the question she had asked. Ralph had been more struck even by her manner than her words. He was sure that something lurked behind, and had an idea of his own that it was connected with Dunster's disappearance. But he was glad that Mr. Ness's joining them gave him leisure to consider a little.

The end of his reflections was, that the next day, Monday, he went into the town, and artfully learnt all he could hear about Mr. Dunster's character and mode of going on; and with still more skill he extracted the popular opinion as to the embarrassed nature of Mr. Wilkins's affairs—embarrassment which was generally attributed to Dunster's disappearance with a good large sum belonging to the firm

in his possession. But Mr. Corbet thought otherwise; he had accustomed himself to seek out the baser motives for men's conduct, and to call the result of these researches wisdom. He imagined that Dunster had been well paid by Mr. Wilkins for his disappearance, which was an easy way of accounting for the derangement of accounts and loss of money that arose, in fact, from Mr. Wilkins's extravagance of habits and growing intemperance.

On the Monday afternoon he said to Ellinor, "Mr. Ness interrupted us yesterday in a very interesting conversation. Do you remember, love?"

Ellinor reddened, and kept her head still more intently bent over a sketch she was making.

"Yes; I recollect."

"I have been thinking about it. I still think she ought to tell her lover that such disgrace hung over him—I mean, over the family with whom he was going to connect himself. Of course, the only effect would be to make him stand by her still more for her frankness."

"Oh! but, Ralph, it might perhaps be something she ought not to tell, whatever came of her silence."

"Of course there might be all sorts of cases. Unless I knew more, I could not pretend to judge."

This was said rather more coolly. It had the desired effect. Ellinor laid down her brush, and covered her face with her hand. After a pause, she turned towards him and said—

"I will tell you this; and more you must not ask me. I know you are as safe as can be. I am the girl, you are the lover, and possible shame hangs over my father, if something—oh, so dreadful" (here she blanched), "but not so very much his fault, is ever found out."

Though this was nothing more than he expected, though Ralph thought that he was aware what the dreadful something might be, yet, when it was acknowledged in words, his heart contracted, and for a moment he forgot the intent, wistful, beautiful face, creeping close to his, to read his

expression aright. But after that his presence of mind came in aid. He took her in his arms and kissed her; murmuring fond words of sympathy, and promises of faith, nay, even of greater love than before, since greater need she might have of that love. But somehow he was glad when the dressing-bell rang, and in the solitude of his own room he could reflect on what he had heard; for the intelligence had been a great shock to him, although he had fancied that his morning's inquiries had prepared him for it.

CHAPTER IX

Ralph Corbet found it a very difficult thing to keep down his curiosity during the next few days. It was a miserable thing to have Ellinor's unspoken secret severing them like a phantom. But he had given her his word that he would make no further inquiries from her. Indeed, he thought he could well enough make out the outline of past events; still, there was too much left to conjecture for his mind not to be always busy on the subject. He felt inclined to probe Mr. Wilkins in their after-dinner conversation, in which his host was frank and lax enough on many subjects. But once touch on the name of Dunster and Mr. Wilkins sank into a kind of suspicious depression of spirits; talking little, and with evident caution; and from time to time shooting furtive glances at his interlocutor's face. Ellinor was resolutely impervious to any attempts of his to bring his conversation with her back to the subject which more and more engrossed Ralph Corbet's mind. She had done her duty, as she understood it, and had received assurances which she was only too glad to believe fondly with all the tender faith of her heart. Whatever came to pass, Ralph's love would still be hers; nor was he unwarned of what might come to pass in some dread future day. So she shut her eyes to what might be in

store for her (and, after all, the chances were immeasurably in her favour); and she bent herself with her whole strength into enjoying the present. Day by day Mr. Corbet's spirits flagged. He was, however, so generally uniform in the tenor of his talk—never very merry, and always avoiding any subject that might call out deep feeling either on his own or any one else's part—that few people were aware of his changes of mood. Ellinor felt them, though she would not acknowledge them: it was bringing her too much face to face with the great terror of her life.

One morning he announced the fact of his brother's approaching marriage; the wedding was hastened on account of some impending event in the duke's family; and the home letter he had received that day was to bid his presence at Stokely Castle, and also to desire him to be at home by a certain time not very distant, in order to look over the requisite legal papers, and to give his assent to some of them. He gave many reasons why this unlooked-for departure of his was absolutely necessary; but no one doubted it. He need not have alleged such reiterated excuses. The truth was, he felt restrained and uncomfortable at Ford Bank ever since Ellinor's confidence. He could not rightly calculate on the most desirable course for his own interests, while his love for her was constantly being renewed by her sweet presence. Away from her, he could judge more wisely. Nor did he allege any false reasons for his departure; but the sense of relief to himself was so great at his recall home, that he was afraid of its being perceived by others; and so took the very way which, if others had been as penetrating as himself, would have betrayed him.

Mr. Wilkins, too, had begun to feel the restraint of Ralph's grave watchful presence. Ellinor was not strong enough to be married; nor was the promised money forthcoming if she had been. And to have a fellow dawdling about the house all day, sauntering into the flower-garden, peering about everywhere, and having a kind of right to put all manner of unexpected questions, was anything but

agreeable. It was only Ellinor that clung to his presence—clung as though some shadow of what might happen before they met again had fallen on her spirit. As soon as he had left the house, she flew up to a spare-bedroom window, to watch for the last glimpse of the fly which was taking him into the town. And then she kissed the part of the pane on which his figure, waving an arm out of the carriage window, had last appeared; and went down slowly to gather together all the things he had last touched—the pen he had mended, the flower he had played with, and to lock them up in the little quaint cabinet that had held her treasures since she was a tiny child.

Miss Monro was, perhaps, very wise in proposing the translation of a difficult part of Dante for a distraction to Ellinor. The girl went meekly, if reluctantly, to the task set her by her good governess, and by-and-by her mind became braced by the exertion.

Ralph's people were not very slow in discovering that something had not gone on quite smoothly with him at Ford Bank. They knew his ways and looks with family intuition, and could easily be certain thus far. But not even his mother's skilfulest wiles, nor his favourite sister's coaxing, could obtain a word or a hint; and, when his father, the squire, who had heard the opinions of the female part of the family on this head, began, in his honest, blustering way, in their *tête-à-têtes* after dinner, to hope that Ralph was thinking better than to run his head into that confounded Hamley attorney's noose, Ralph gravely required Mr. Corbet to explain his meaning, which he professed not to understand so worded. And when the squire had, with much perplexity, put it into the plain terms of hoping that his son was thinking of breaking off his engagement with Miss Wilkins, Ralph coolly asked him if he was aware that, in that case, he should lose all title to being a man of honour, and might have an action brought against him for breach of promise?

Yet not the less for all this was the idea in his mind as a future possibility.

Before very long the Corbet family moved *en masse* to Stokely Castle for the wedding. Of course, Ralph associated on equal terms with the magnates of the county, who were the employers of Ellinor's father, and spoke of him always as "Wilkins," just as they spoke of the butler as "Simmons." Here, too, among a class of men high above local gossip, and thus unaware of his engagement, he learnt the popular opinion respecting his future father-in-law; an opinion not entirely respectful, though intermingled with a good deal of personal liking. "Poor Wilkins," as they called him, "was sadly extravagant for a man in his position; had no right to spend money and act as if he were a man of independent fortune." His habits of life were criticised; and pity, not free from blame, was bestowed upon him for the losses he had sustained from his late clerk's disappearance and defalcation. But what could be expected if a man did not choose to attend to his own business?

The wedding went by, as grand weddings do, without let or hindrance, according to the approved pattern. A Cabinet minister honoured it with his presence, and, being a distant relation to the Brabants, remained for a few days after the grand occasion. During this time he became rather intimate with Ralph Corbet; many of their tastes were in common. Ralph took a great interest in the manner of working out political questions; in the balance and state of parties; and had the right appreciation of the exact qualities on which the minister piqued himself. In return, the latter was always on the look-out for promising young men, who, by their capability either of speech-making or of article-writing, might advance the views of his party. Recognising the powers he most valued in Ralph, he spared no pains to attach him to his own political set. When they separated, it was with the full understanding that they were to see a good deal of each other in London.

The holiday Ralph allowed himself was passing rapidly away; but, before he returned to his chambers and his hard work, he had promised to spend a few more days with

Ellinor; and it suited him to go straight from the duke's to Ford Bank. He left the Castle soon after breakfast—the luxurious, elegant breakfast, served by domestics who performed their work with the accuracy and perfection of machines. He arrived at Ford Bank, before the man-servant had quite finished the dirtier part of his morning's work, and he came to the glass-door in his striped cotton jacket, a little soiled, and rolling up his working apron. Ellinor was not yet strong enough to get up early, to go out and gather flowers for the rooms, so those left from yesterday were rather faded; in short, the contrast from entire completeness and exquisite freshness of arrangement struck forcibly upon Ralph's perceptions, which were critical rather than appreciative; and, as his affections were always subdued to his intellect, Ellinor's lovely face and graceful figure, flying to meet him, did not gain his full approval; because her hair was dressed in an old-fashioned way, her waist was either too long or too short, her sleeves too full or too tight for the standard of fashion to which his eye had been accustomed, while scanning the bridesmaids and various highborn ladies at Stokely Castle.

But, as he had always piqued himself upon being able to put on one side all superficial worldliness in his chase after power, it did not do for him to shrink from seeing and facing the incompleteness of moderate means. Only, marriage upon moderate means was gradually becoming more distasteful to him.

Nor did his subsequent intercourse with Lord Bolton, the Cabinet minister before mentioned, tend to reconcile him to early matrimony. At Lord Bolton's house he met polished and intellectual society, and all that smoothness in ministering to the lower wants in eating and drinking which seems to provide that the right thing shall always be at the right place at the right time, so that the want of it shall never impede for an instant the feast of wit or reason; while, if he went to the houses of his friends, men of the same college and standing as himself, who had been

seduced into early marriages, he was uncomfortably aware of numerous inconsistencies and hitches in their *ménages*. Besides, the idea of the possible disgrace that might befall the family with which he thought of allying himself haunted him with the tenacity and also with the exaggeration of a nightmare, whenever he had overworked himself in his search after available and profitable knowledge, or had a fit of indigestion after the exquisite dinners he was learning so well to appreciate.

Christmas was, of course, to be devoted to his own family; it was an unavoidable necessity, as he told Ellinor; while, in reality, he was beginning to find absence from his betrothed something of a relief. Yet the wranglings and folly of his home, even blessed by the presence of a Lady Maria, made him look forward to Easter at Ford Bank with something of the old pleasure.

Ellinor, with the fine tact which love gives, had discovered his annoyance at various little incongruities in the household at the time of his second visit in the previous autumn, and had laboured to make all as perfect as she could before his return. But she had much to struggle against. For the first time in her life there was a great want of ready money; she could scarcely obtain the servants' wages; and the bill for the spring seeds was a heavy weight on her conscience. For Miss Monro's methodical habits had taught her pupil great exactitude as to all money-matters.

Then her father's temper had become very uncertain. He avoided being alone with her whenever he possibly could; and the consciousness of this, and of the terrible mutual secret which was the cause of this estrangement, were the reasons why Ellinor never recovered her pretty youthful bloom after her illness. Of course it was to this that the outside world attributed her changed appearance. They would shake their heads and say, "Ah, poor Miss Wilkins! What a lovely creature she was before that fever!"

But youth is youth, and will assert itself in a certain

elasticity of body and spirits; and at times Ellinor forgot that fearful night, for several hours together. Even when her father's averted eye brought it all once more before her, she had learnt to form excuses and palliations, and to regard Mr. Dunster's death as only the consequence of an unfortunate accident. But she tried to put the miserable remembrance entirely out of her mind; to go on from day to day thinking only of each day, and how to arrange it so as to cause the least irritation to her father. She would so gladly have spoken to him on the one subject which overshadowed all their intercourse; she fancied that by speaking she might have been able to banish the phantom, or reduce its terror to what she believed to be the due proportion. But her father was evidently determined to show that he was never more to be spoken to on that subject; and all she could do was to follow his lead on the rare occasions when they fell into something like the old confidential intercourse. As yet, to her, he had never given way to anger; but before her he had often spoken in a manner which both pained and terrified her. Sometimes his eye, in the midst of his passion, caught on her face of affright and dismay; and then he would stop, and make such an effort to control himself as sometimes ended in tears. Ellinor did not understand that both these phases were owing to his increasing habit of drinking more than he ought to have done. She set them down as the direct effects of a sorely-burdened conscience; and strove more and more to plan for his daily life at home—how it should go on with oiled wheels, with neither a jerk nor a jar. It was no wonder she looked wistful, and careworn, and old. Miss Monro was her great comfort; the total unconsciousness on that lady's part of anything below the surface, and yet her full and delicate recognition of all the little daily cares and trials, made her sympathy most valuable to Ellinor; while there was no need to fear that it would ever give Miss Monro that power of seeing into the heart of things which it frequently confers upon imaginative people, who are deeply attached to some one in sorrow.

There was a strong bond between Ellinor and Dixon, although they scarcely ever exchanged a word save on the most commonplace subjects; but their silence was based on different feelings from that which separated Ellinor from her father. Ellinor and Dixon could not speak freely, because their hearts were full of pity for the faulty man whom they both loved so well, and tried so hard to respect.

This was the state of the household to which Ralph Corbet came down at Easter. He might have been known in London as a brilliant diner-out by this time; but he could not afford to throw his life away in fireworks; he calculated his forces, and condensed their power as much as might be, only visiting where he was likely to meet men who could help in his future career. He had been invited to spend the Easter vacation at a certain country-house which would be full of such human stepping-stones; and he declined, in order to keep his word to Ellinor and go to Ford Bank. But he could not help looking upon himself a little in the light of a martyr to duty; and perhaps this view of his own merits made him chafe under his future father-in-law's irritability of manner, which now showed itself even to him. He found himself distinctly regretting that he had suffered himself to be engaged so early in life; and, having become conscious of the temptation and not having repelled it at once, of course it returned and returned, and gradually obtained the mastery over him. What was to be gained by keeping to his engagement with Ellinor? He should have a delicate wife to look after, and even more than the common additional expenses of married life. He should have a father-in-law whose character at best had had only a local and provincial respectability, which it was now daily losing by habits which were both sensual and vulgarising; a man, too, who was strangely changing from joyous geniality into moody surliness. Besides, he doubted if, in the evident change in the prosperity of the family, the fortune to be paid down on the occasion of his marriage to Ellinor could be forthcoming. And above all, and around all, there hovered

the shadow of some unrevealed disgrace, which might come to light at any time and involve him in it. He thought he had pretty well ascertained the nature of this possible shame, and had little doubt it would turn out to be that Dunster's disappearance, to America or elsewhere, had been an arranged plan with Mr. Wilkins. Although Mr. Ralph Corbet was capable of suspecting him of this mean crime (so far removed from the impulsive commission of the past sin which was dragging him daily lower and lower down), it was of a kind that was peculiarly distasteful to the acute lawyer, who foresaw how such base conduct would taint all whose names were ever mentioned, even by chance, in connection with it. He used to lie miserably tossing on his sleepless bed, turning over these things in the night season. He was tormented by all these thoughts; he would bitterly regret the past events that connected him with Ellinor, from the day when he first came to read with Mr. Ness up to the present time. But, when he came down in the morning, and saw the faded Ellinor flash into momentary beauty at his entrance into the dining-room, and when she blushingly drew near with the one single flower freshly gathered, which it had been her custom to place in his button-hole when he came down to breakfast, he felt as if his better self was stronger than temptation, and as if he must be an honest man and honourable lover, even against his wish.

As the day wore on, the temptation gathered strength. Mr. Wilkins came down; and, while he was on the scene, Ellinor seemed always engrossed by her father, who apparently cared little enough for all her attentions. Then there was a complaining of the food, which did not suit the sickly palate of a man who had drunk hard the night before; and possibly these complaints were extended to the servants, and their incompleteness or incapacity was thus brought prominently before the eyes of Ralph, who would have preferred to eat a dry crust in silence or to have gone without breakfast altogether, if he could have had intellectual conversation of some high order, to having the greatest dainties with the

knowledge of the care required in their preparation thus coarsely discussed before him. By the time such breakfasts were finished, Ellinor looked thirty, and her spirits were gone for the day. It had become difficult for Ralph to contract his mind to her small domestic interests, and she had little else to talk to him about, now that he responded but curtly to all her questions about himself, and was weary of professing a love which he was ceasing to feel, in all the passionate nothings which usually make up so much of lovers' talk. The books she had been reading were old classics whose place in literature no longer admitted of keen discussion; the poor whom she cared for were all very well in their way; and, if they could have been brought in to illustrate a theory, hearing about them might have been of some use; but, as it was, it was simply tiresome to hear day after day of Betty Palmer's rheumatism and Mrs. Kay's baby's fits. There was no talking politics with her, because she was so ignorant that she always agreed with everything he said.

He even grew to find luncheon and Miss Monro not unpleasant varieties to his monotonous *tête-à-têtes*. Then came the walk, generally to the town to fetch Mr. Wilkins from his office; and, once or twice, it was pretty evident how he had been employing his hours. One day in particular, his walk was so unsteady and his speech so thick, that Ralph could only wonder how it was that Ellinor did not perceive the cause; but she was too openly anxious about the headache of which her father complained, to have been at all aware of the previous self-indulgence which must have brought it on. This very afternoon, as ill-luck would have it, the Duke of Hinton and a gentleman whom Ralph had met in town at Lord Bolton's rode by, and recognised him; saw Ralph supporting a tipsy man with such quiet friendly interest as must show all passers-by that they were previous friends. Mr. Corbet chafed and fumed inwardly all the way home after this unfortunate occurrence; he was in a thoroughly evil temper before they reached Ford Bank; but

he had too much self-command to let this be very apparent. He turned into the shrubbery paths, leaving Ellinor to take her father into the quietness of his own room, there to lie down and shake off his headache.

Ralph walked along, ruminating in gloomy mood as to what was to be done; how he could best extricate himself from the miserable relation in which he had placed himself by giving way to impulse. Almost before he was aware, a little hand stole within his folded arms, and Ellinor's sweet sad eyes looked into his.

"I have put papa down for an hour's rest before dinner," said she. "His head seems to ache terribly."

Ralph was silent and unsympathising, trying to nerve himself up to be disagreeable, but finding it difficult in the face of such sweet trust.

"Do you remember our conversation last autumn, Ellinor?" he began at length.

Her head sank. They were near a garden-seat, and she quietly sat down, without speaking.

"About some disgrace which you then fancied hung over you?" No answer. "Does it still hang over you?"

"Yes!" she whispered, with a heavy sigh.

"And your father knows this, of course?"

"Yes!" again in the same tone; and then silence.

"I think it is doing him harm," at length Ralph went on decidedly.

"I am afraid it is," she said, in a low tone.

"I wish you would tell me what it is," he said, a little impatiently. "I might be able to help you about it."

"No! you could not," replied Ellinor. "I was sorry to my very heart to tell you what I did; I did not want help; all that is past. But I wanted to know if you thought that a person situated as I was, was justified in marrying any one ignorant of what might happen, what I do hope and trust never will."

"But if I don't know what you are alluding to in this mysterious way, you must see—don't you see, love?—I am

in the position of the ignorant man whom I think you said you could not feel it right to marry. Why don't you tell me straight out what it is?" He could not help his irritation betraying itself in his tones and manner of speaking. She bent a little forward, and looked full into his face, as though to pierce to the very heart's truth of him. Then she said, as quietly as she had ever spoken in her life—

"You wish to break off our engagement?"

He reddened and grew indignant in a moment. "What nonsense! Just because I ask a question and make a remark! I think your illness must have made you fanciful, Ellinor. Surely nothing I said deserves such an interpretation. On the contrary, have I not shown the sincerity and depth of my affection to you by clinging to you through——through everything?"

He was going to say "through the wearying opposition of my family"; but he stopped short, for he knew that the very fact of his mother's opposition had only made him the more determined to have his own way in the first instance; and even now he did not intend to let out, what he had concealed up to this time, that his friends all regretted his imprudent engagement.

Ellinor sat silently gazing out upon the meadows, but seeing nothing. Then she put her hand into his. "I quite trust you, Ralph. I was wrong to doubt. I am afraid I have grown fanciful and silly."

He was rather put to it for the right words, for she had precisely divined the dim thought that had overshadowed his mind, when she had looked so intently at him. But he caressed her, and reassured her with fond words, as incoherent as lovers' words generally are.

By-and-by, they sauntered homewards. When they reached the house, Ellinor left him, and flew up to see how her father was. When Ralph went into his own room, he was vexed with himself, both for what he had said and for what he had not said. His mental look-out was not satisfactory.

Neither he nor Mr. Wilkins was in good humour with the world in general at dinner-time, and it needs little in such cases to condense and turn the lowering tempers into one particular direction. As long as Ellinor and Miss Monro stayed in the dining-room, a sort of moody peace had been kept up, the ladies talking incessantly to each other about the trivial nothings of their daily life, with an instinctive consciousness that, if they did not chatter on, something would be said by one of the gentlemen which would be distasteful to the other.

As soon as Ralph had shut the door behind them, Mr. Wilkins went to the sideboard, and took out a bottle which had not previously made its appearance.

"Have a little cognac?" he asked, with an assumption of carelessness, as he poured out a wine-glassful. "It's a capital thing for the headache; and this nasty lowering weather has given me a racking headache all day."

"I am sorry for it," said Ralph; "for I wanted particularly to speak to you about business—about my marriage, in fact."

"Well, speak away! I'm as clear-headed as any man, if that's what you mean."

Ralph bowed, a little contemptuously.

"What I wanted to say was, that I am anxious to have all things arranged for my marriage in August. Ellinor is so much better now; in fact, so strong, that I think we may reckon upon her standing the change to a London life pretty well."

Mr. Wilkins stared at him rather blankly, but did not immediately speak.

"Of course I may have the deeds drawn up in which, as by previous arrangement, you advance a certain portion of Ellinor's fortune for the purposes therein to be assigned; as we settled last year when I hoped to have been married in August?"

A thought flitted through Mr. Wilkins's confused brain that he should find it impossible to produce the thousands

required without having recourse to the money-lenders, who were already making difficulties, and charging him usurious interest for the advances they had lately made; and he unwisely tried to obtain a diminution in the sum he had originally proposed to give Ellinor. "Unwisely," because he might have read Ralph's character better than to suppose he would easily consent to any diminution, without good and sufficient reason being given; or without some promise of advantages compensating in the future for the present sacrifice asked from him. But perhaps Mr. Wilkins, dulled as he was by wine, thought he could allege a good and sufficient reason, for he said—

"You must not be hard upon me, Ralph. That promise was made before—before I exactly knew the state of my affairs!"

"Before Dunster's disappearance, in fact," said Mr. Corbet, fixing his steady, penetrating eyes on Mr. Wilkins's countenance.

"Yes—exactly—before Dunster's"—— mumbled out Mr. Wilkins, red and confused, and not finishing his sentence.

"By the way," said Ralph (for, with careful carelessness of manner, he thought he could extract something of the real nature of the impending disgrace from his companion, in the state in which he then was; and, if he only knew more about this danger, he could guard against it; guard others; perhaps himself)—"By the way, have you ever heard anything of Dunster since he went off to—America, isn't it thought?"

He was startled beyond his power of self-control by the instantaneous change in Mr. Wilkins which his question produced. Both started up; Mr. Wilkins white, shaking, and trying to say something, but unable to form a sensible sentence.

"Good God! sir, what is the matter?" said Ralph, alarmed at these signs of physical suffering.

Mr. Wilkins sat down, and repelled his nearer approach without speaking.

"It is nothing—only this headache which shoots through me at times. Don't look at me, sir, in that way! It is very unpleasant to find another man's eyes perpetually fixed upon you."

"I beg your pardon," said Ralph coldly; his short-lived sympathy, thus repulsed, giving way to his curiosity. But he waited for a minute or two without daring to renew the conversation at the point where they had stopped: whether interrupted by bodily or mental discomfort on the part of his companion he was not quite sure. While he hesitated how to begin again on the subject, Mr. Wilkins pulled the bottle of brandy to himself and filled his glass again, tossing off the spirit as if it had been water. Then he tried to look Mr. Corbet full in the face, with a stare as pertinacious as he could make it, but very different from the keen, observant gaze which was trying to read him through.

"What were we talking about?" said Ralph at length, with the most natural air in the world, just as if he had really been forgetful of some half-discussed subject of interest.

"Of what you'd a d——d deal better hold your tongue about," growled out Mr. Wilkins, in a surly, thick voice.

"Sir!" said Ralph, starting to his feet with real passion at being so addressed by "Wilkins the attorney."

"Yes," continued the latter; "I'll manage my own affairs, and allow of no meddling and no questioning. I said so once before, and I was not minded, and bad came of it; and now I say it again. And if you're to come here and put impertinent questions, and stare at me as you've been doing this half-hour past, why, the sooner you leave this house the better!"

Ralph half turned to take him at his word, and go at once; but then he "gave Ellinor another chance," as he worded it in his thoughts; but it was in no spirit of conciliation that he said—

"You've taken too much of that stuff, sir. You don't know what you're saying. If you did, I should leave your house at once, never to return."

"You think so, do you?" said Mr. Wilkins, trying to stand up, and look dignified and sober. "I say, sir, that if you ever venture again to talk and look as you have done to-night, why, sir, I will ring the bell and have you shown the door by my servants! So now you're warned, my fine fellow!" He sat down, laughing a foolish tipsy laugh of triumph. In another minute his arm was held firmly but gently by Ralph.

"Listen, Mr. Wilkins," he said, in a low hoarse voice. "You shall never have to say to me twice what you have said to-night. Henceforward we are as strangers to each other. As to Ellinor"—his tones softened a little, and he sighed in spite of himself—"I do not think we should have been happy. I believe our engagement was formed when we were too young to know our own minds, but I would have done my duty and kept to my word; but you, sir, have yourself severed the connection between us by your insolence to-night. I, to be turned out of your house by your servants!—I, a Corbet of Westley, who would not submit to such threats from a peer of the realm, let him be ever so drunk!" He was out of the room, almost out of the house, before he had spoken the last words.

Mr. Wilkins sat still, first fiercely angry, then astonished, and lastly dismayed into sobriety. "Corbet, Corbet! Ralph!" he called in vain; then he got up and went to the door, opened it, looked into the fully-lighted hall; all was so quiet there that he could hear the quiet voices of the women in the drawing-room talking together. He thought for a moment, went to the hat-stand, and missed Ralph's low-crowned straw hat.

Then he sat down once more in the dining-room, and endeavoured to make out exactly what had passed; but he could not believe that Mr. Corbet had come to any enduring or final resolution to break off his engagement; and he had almost reasoned himself back into his former state of indignation at impertinence and injury, when Ellinor came in, pale, hurried, and anxious.

"Papa! what does this mean?" said she, putting an open note into his hand. He took up his glasses, but his hand shook so that he could hardly read. The note was from the Parsonage, to Ellinor; only three lines sent by Mr. Ness's servant, who had come to fetch Mr. Corbet's things. He had written three lines, with some consideration for Ellinor, even when he was in his first flush of anger against her father, and it must be confessed of relief at his own freedom, thus brought about by the act of another, and not of his own working-out; which partly saved his conscience. The note ran thus:

"DEAR ELLINOR,—Words have passed between your father and me which have obliged me to leave his house—I fear, never to return to it. I will write more fully to-morrow. But do not grieve too much; for I am not, and never have been, good enough for you. God bless you, my dearest Nelly, though I call you so for the last time.—R. C."

"Papa, what is it?" Ellinor cried, clasping her hands together, as her father sat silent, vacantly gazing into the fire, after finishing the note.

"I don't know!" said he, looking up at her piteously; "it's the world, I think. Everything goes wrong with me and mine; it went wrong before THAT night—so it can't be that, can it, Ellinor?"

"Oh, papa!" said she, kneeling down by him, her face hidden on his breast.

He put one arm languidly round her. "I used to read of Orestes and the Furies at Eton when I was a boy, and I thought it was all a heathen fiction. Poor little motherless girl!" said he, laying his other hand on her head, with the caressing gesture he had been accustomed to use when she had been a little child. "Did you love him so very dearly, Nelly?" he whispered, his cheek against her; "for somehow of late he has not seemed to me good enough for thee. He has got an inkling that something has gone wrong, and

he was very inquisitive—I may say he questioned me in a relentless kind of way."

"Oh, papa, it was my doing, I'm afraid. I said something long ago about possible disgrace."

He pushed her away; he stood up, and looked at her with the eyes dilated, half in fear, half in fierceness, of an animal at bay; he did not heed that his abrupt movement had almost thrown her prostrate on the ground.

"You, Ellinor! You—you"——

"Oh, darling father, listen!" said she, creeping to his knees, and clasping them with her hands. "I said it, as if it were a possible case, of some one else—last August—but he immediately applied it, and asked me if it was over me the disgrace, or shame—I forget the words we used—hung; and what could I say?"

"Anything—anything, to put him off the scent! God help me, I am a lost man, betrayed by my child!"

Ellinor let go his knees, and covered her face. Every one stabbed at that poor heart. In a minute or so, her father spoke again.

"I don't mean what I say. I often don't mean it now. Ellinor, you must forgive me, my child!" He stooped, and lifted her up, and sat down, taking her on his knee, and smoothing her hair off her hot forehead. "Remember, child, how very miserable I am, and have forgiveness for me! He had none, and yet he must have seen I had been drinking."

"Drinking, papa!" said Ellinor, raising her head, and looking at him with sorrowful surprise.

"Yes. I drink now, to try and forget," said he, blushing and confused.

"Oh, how miserable we are!" cried Ellinor, bursting into tears—"how very miserable! It seems almost as if God had forgotten to comfort us!"

"Hush! hush!" said he. "Your mother said once, she did so pray that you might grow up religious; you must be religious, child, because she prayed for it so often. Poor

Lettice, how glad I am that you are dead!" Here he began to cry like a child. Ellinor comforted him with kisses rather than words. He pushed her away, after a while, and said sharply: "How much does he know? I must make sure of that. How much did you tell him, Ellinor?"

"Nothing—nothing, indeed, papa, but what I told you just now!"

"Tell it me again—the exact words!"

"I will, as well as I can; but it was last August. I only said, 'Was it right for a woman to marry, knowing that disgrace hung over her, and keeping her lover in ignorance of it?'"

"That was all, you are sure?"

"Yes. He immediately applied the case to me—to ourselves."

"And he never wanted to know what was the nature of the threatened disgrace?"

"Yes, he did."

"And you told him?"

"No, not a word more. He referred to the subject again to-day, in the shrubbery; but I told him nothing more. You quite believe me, don't you, papa?"

He pressed her to him, but did not speak. Then he took the note up again, and read it with as much care and attention as he could collect in his agitated state of mind.

"Nelly," said he at length, "he says true; he is not good enough for thee. He shrinks from the thought of the disgrace. Thou must stand alone, and bear the sins of thy father."

He shook so much as he said this, that Ellinor had to put any suffering of her own on one side, and try to confine her thoughts to the necessity of getting her father immediately up to bed. She sat by him till he went to sleep, and she could leave him, and go to her own room, to forgetfulness and rest—if she could find those priceless blessings.

CHAPTER X

Mr. Corbet was so well known at the Parsonage by the two old servants, that he had no difficulty, on reaching it, after his departure from Ford Bank, in having the spare-bed-chamber made ready for him, late as it was, and in the absence of the master, who had taken a little holiday, now that Lent and Easter were over, for the purpose of fishing. While his room was getting ready, Ralph sent for his clothes, and by the same messenger he despatched the little note to Ellinor. But there was the letter he had promised her in it still to be written; and it was almost his night's employment to say enough, yet not too much; for, as he expressed it to himself, he was half way over the stream, and it would be folly to turn back, for he had given nearly as much pain both to himself and Ellinor by this time as he should do by making the separation final. Besides, after Mr. Wilkins's speeches that evening—but he was candid enough to acknowledge that, bad and offensive as they had been, if they had stood alone they might have been condoned.

His letter ran as follows:—

"Dearest Ellinor, for dearest you are, and I think will ever be, my judgment has consented to a step which is giving me great pain, greater than you will readily believe. I am convinced that it is better that we should part; for circumstances have occurred since we formed our engagement which, although I am unaware of their exact nature, I can see weigh heavily upon you, and have materially affected your father's behaviour—nay, I think, after to-night, I may almost say have entirely altered his feelings towards me. What these circumstances are I am ignorant, any further than that I know from your own admission, that they may lead to some future disgrace. Now, it may be my fault, it may be in my temperament, to be anxious, above all

things earthly, to obtain and possess a high reputation. I can only say that it is so, and leave you to blame me for my weakness as much as you like. But anything that might come in between me and this object would, I own, be ill tolerated by me; the very dread of such an obstacle intervening would paralyse me. I should become irritable, and, deep as my affection is, and always must be, towards you, I could not promise you a happy, peaceful life. I should be perpetually haunted by the idea of what might happen in the way of discovery and shame. I am the more convinced of this from my observation of your father's altered character —an alteration which I trace back to the time when I conjecture that the secret affairs took place to which you have alluded. In short, it is for your sake, my dear Ellinor, even more than for my own, that I feel compelled to affix a final meaning to the words which your father addressed to me last night, when he desired me to leave his house for ever. God bless you, my Ellinor—for the last time my Ellinor! Try to forget, as soon as you can, the unfortunate tie which has bound you for a time to one so unsuitable—I believe I ought to say so unworthy of you—as—Ralph Corbet."

Ellinor was making breakfast, when this letter was given her. According to the wont of the servants of the respective households of the Parsonage and Ford Bank, the man asked if there was any answer. It was only custom; for he had not been desired to do so. Ellinor went to the window to read her letter; the man waiting all the time respectfully for her reply. She went to the writing-table, and wrote—

"It is all right—quite right. I ought to have thought of it all last August. I do not think you will forget me easily; but I entreat you never at any future time to blame yourself. I hope you will be happy and successful. I suppose I must never write to you again: but I shall always pray for you. Papa was very sorry last night for having spoken angrily to you. You must forgive him—there is great need for forgiveness in this world.—Ellinor."

She kept putting down thought after thought, just to prolong the last pleasure of writing to him. She sealed the note, and gave it to the man. Then she sat down and waited for Miss Monro, who had gone to bed on the previous night without awaiting Ellinor's return from the dining-room.

"I am late, my dear," said Miss Monro, on coming down, "but I have a bad headache, and I knew you had a pleasant companion." Then, looking round, she perceived Ralph's absence.

"Mr. Corbet not down yet!" she exclaimed. And then Ellinor had to tell her the outline of the facts so soon likely to be made public; that Mr. Corbet and she had determined to break off their engagement; and that Mr. Corbet had accordingly betaken himself to the Parsonage; and that she did not expect him to return again to Ford Bank. Miss Monro's astonishment was unbounded. She kept going over and over all the little circumstances she had noticed during the last visit, only yesterday, in fact, which she could not reconcile with the notion that the two, apparently so much attached to each other but a few hours before, were now to be for ever separated and estranged. Ellinor sickened under the torture; which yet seemed like torture in a dream, from which there must come an awakening and a relief. She felt as if she could not bear any more; yet there was more to bear. Her father, as it turned out, was very ill, and had been so all night long; he had evidently had some kind of attack on the brain, whether apoplectic or paralytic it was for the doctors to decide. In the hurry and anxiety of this day of misery succeeding to misery, she almost forgot to wonder whether Ralph were still at the Parsonage—still in Hamley; it was not till the evening visit of the physician that she learnt that he had been seen by Dr. Moore as he was taking his place in the morning mail to London. Dr. Moore alluded to his name as to a thought that would cheer and comfort the fragile girl during her night-watch by her father's bedside. But Miss Monro stole out after the doctor, to warn him off the subject for the

future, crying bitterly over the forlorn position of her darling as she spoke—crying as Ellinor had never yet been able to cry; though all the time, in the pride of her sex, she was endeavouring to persuade the doctor it was entirely Ellinor's doing, and the wisest and best thing she could have done, as he was not good enough for her, only a poor barrister struggling for a livelihood. Like many other kind-hearted people, she fell into the blunder of lowering the moral character of those whom it is their greatest wish to exalt. But Dr. Moore knew Ellinor too well to believe the whole of what Miss Monro said; she would never act from interested motives, and was all the more likely to cling to a man because he was down and unsuccessful. No! there had been a lovers' quarrel; and it could not have happened at a sadder time.

Before the June roses were in full bloom, Mr. Wilkins was dead. He had left his daughter to the guardianship of Mr. Ness by some will made years ago; but Mr. Ness had caught a rheumatic fever with his Easter fishings, and could not for some time be moved home from the little Welsh inn where he had been staying when he was taken ill. Since his last attack, Mr. Wilkins's mind had been much affected; he often talked strangely and wildly; but he had rare intervals of quietness and full possession of his senses. At one of these times he must have written a half-finished pencil note, which his nurse found under his pillow after his death, and brought to Ellinor. Through her tear-blinded eyes she read the weak, faltering words—

"I am very ill. I sometimes think I shall never get better; so I wish to ask your pardon for what I said the night before I was taken ill. I am afraid my anger made mischief between you and Ellinor; but I think you will forgive a dying man. If you will come back and let all be as it used to be, I will make any apology you may require. If I go, she will be so very friendless; and I have looked to you to care for her ever since you first"—— Then came some illegible and incoherent writing, ending with, "From

my deathbed I adjure you to stand her friend; I will beg pardon on my knees for anything"——

And there strength had failed; the paper and pencil had been laid aside, to be resumed at some time when the brain was clearer, the hand stronger. Ellinor kissed the letter, reverently folded it up, and laid it among her sacred treasures, by her mother's half-finished sewing, and a little curl of her baby sister's golden hair.

Mr. Johnson, who had been one of the trustees for Mrs. Wilkins's marriage settlement, a respectable solicitor in the county town, and Mr. Ness, had been appointed executors of his will, and guardians to Ellinor. The will itself had been made several years before, when he imagined himself the possessor of a handsome fortune, the bulk of which he bequeathed to his only child. By her mother's marriage-settlement, Ford Bank was held in trust for the children of the marriage; the trustees being Sir Frank Holster and Mr. Johnson. There were legacies to his executors; a small annuity to Miss Monro, with the expression of a hope that it might be arranged for her to continue living with Ellinor as long as the latter remained unmarried; all his servants were remembered, Dixon especially, and most liberally.

What remained of the handsome fortune once possessed by the testator? The executors asked in vain; there was nothing. They could hardly make out what had become of it, in such utter confusion were all the accounts, both personal and official. Mr. Johnson was hardly restrained by his compassion for the orphan from throwing up the executorship in disgust. Mr. Ness roused himself from his scholarlike abstraction to labour at the examination of books, parchments, and papers, for Ellinor's sake. Sir Frank Holster professed himself only a trustee for Ford Bank.

Meanwhile she went on living at Ford Bank, quite unconscious of the state of her father's affairs, but sunk into a deep, plaintive melancholy, which affected her looks and the tones of her voice in such a manner as to distress Miss Monro exceedingly. It was not that the good lady did not

quite acknowledge the great cause her pupil had for grieving —deserted by her lover, her father dead—but that she could not bear the outward signs of how much these sorrows had told on Ellinor. Her love for the poor girl was infinitely distressed by seeing the daily wasting away, the constant heavy depression of spirits, and she grew impatient of the continual pain of sympathy. If Miss Monro could have done something to relieve Ellinor of her woe, she would have been less inclined to scold her for giving way to it.

The time came when Miss Monro could act; and after that, there was no more irritation on her part. When all hope of Ellinor's having anything beyond the house and grounds of Ford Bank was gone; when it was proved that of all the legacies bequeathed by Mr. Wilkins not one farthing could ever be paid; when it came to be a question how far the beautiful pictures and other objects of art in the house were not legally the property of unsatisfied creditors, the state of her father's affairs was communicated to Ellinor as delicately as Mr. Ness knew how.

She was drooping over her work—she always drooped now—and she left off sewing to listen to him, leaning her head on the arm which rested on the table. She did not speak when he had ended his statement. She was silent for whole minutes afterwards; he went on speaking out of very agitation and awkwardness.

"It was all the rascal Dunster's doing, I've no doubt," said he, trying to account for the entire loss of Mr. Wilkins's fortune.

To his surprise, she lifted up her white, stony face, and said, slowly and faintly, but with almost solemn calmness—

"Mr. Ness, you must never allow Mr. Dunster to be blamed for this!"

"My dear Ellinor, there can be no doubt about it. Your father himself always referred to the losses he had sustained by Dunster's disappearance."

Ellinor covered her face with her hands. "God forgive

us all," she said, and relapsed into the old unbearable silence. Mr. Ness had undertaken to discuss her future plans with her, and he was obliged to go on.

"Now, my dear child—I have known you since you were quite a little girl, you know—we must try not to give way to feeling"—he himself was choking; she was quite quiet—"but think what is to be done. You will have the rent of this house, and we have a very good offer for it—a tenant on lease of seven years at a hundred and twenty pounds a year"——

"I will never let this house," said she, standing up suddenly, and as if defying him.

"Not let Ford Bank! Why? I don't understand it—I can't have been clear—Ellinor, the rent of this house is all you will have to live on!"

"I can't help it, I can't leave this house. Oh, Mr. Ness, I can't leave this house."

"My dear child, you shall not be hurried—I know how hardly all these things are coming upon you (and I wish I had never seen Corbet, with all my heart I do!)"—this was almost to himself, but she must have heard it, for she quivered all over—"but leave this house you must. You must eat, and the rent of this house must pay for your food; you must dress, and there is nothing but the rent to clothe you. I will gladly have you to stay at the Parsonage as long as ever you like; but, in fact, the negotiations with Mr. Osbaldistone, the gentleman who offers to take the house, are nearly completed"——

"It is my house!" said Ellinor fiercely. "I know it is settled on me."

"No, my dear. It is held in trust for you by Sir Frank Holster and Mr. Johnson; you to receive all moneys and benefits accruing from it"—he spoke gently, for he almost thought her head was turned—"but you remember you are not of age, and Mr. Johnson and I have full power."

Ellinor sat down, helpless.

"Leave me," she said at length. "You are very kind,

but you don't know all. I cannot stand any more talking now," she added faintly.

Mr. Ness bent over her and kissed her forehead, and withdrew without another word. He went to Miss Monro.

"Well! and how did you find her?" was her first inquiry, after the usual greetings had passed between them. "It is really quite sad to see how she gives way; I speak to her, and speak to her, and tell her how she is neglecting all her duties, and it does no good."

"She has had to bear a still further sorrow to-day," said Mr. Ness. "On the part of Mr. Johnson and myself I have a very painful duty to perform to you as well as to her. Mr. Wilkins has died insolvent. I grieve to say there is no hope of your ever receiving any of your annuity."

Miss Monro looked very blank. Many happy little visions faded away in those few moments; then she roused up and said, "I am but forty; I have a good fifteen years of work in me left yet, thank God. Insolvent! Do you mean he has left no money?"

"Not a farthing. The creditors may be thankful if they are fully paid."

"And Ellinor?"

"Ellinor will have the rent of this house, which is hers by right of her mother's settlement, to live on."

"How much will that be?"

"One hundred and twenty pounds."

Miss Monro's lips went into a form prepared for whistling. Mr. Ness continued—

"She is at present unwilling enough to leave this house, poor girl. It is but natural; but she has no power in the matter, even were there any other course open to her. I can only say how glad, how honoured, I shall feel by as long a visit as you and she can be prevailed upon to pay me at the Parsonage."

"Where is Mr. Corbet?" said Miss Monro.

"I do not know. After breaking off his engagement, he wrote me a long letter, explanatory, as he called it;

exculpatory, as I termed it. I wrote back, curtly enough, saying that I regretted the breaking off of an intercourse which had always been very pleasant to me; but that he must be aware that, with my intimacy with the family at Ford Bank, it would be both awkward and unpleasant to all parties if he and I remained on our previous footing. Who is that going past the window? Ellinor riding?"

Miss Monro went to the window. "Yes! I am thankful to see her on horseback again. It was only this morning I advised her to have a ride!"

"Poor Dixon! he will suffer too; his legacy can no more be paid than the others; and it is not many young ladies who will be as content to have so old-fashioned a groom riding after them as Ellinor seems to be."

As soon as Mr. Ness had left, Miss Monro went to her desk and wrote a long letter to some friends she had at the cathedral town of East Chester, where she had spent some happy years of her former life. Her thoughts had gone back to this time even while Mr. Ness had been speaking; for it was there her father had lived, and it was after his death that her cares in search of a subsistence had begun. But the recollections of the peaceful years spent there were stronger than the remembrance of the weeks of sorrow and care; and, while Ellinor's marriage had seemed a probable event, she had made many a little plan of returning to her native place, and obtaining what daily teaching she could there meet with; and the friends to whom she was now writing had promised her their aid. She thought that, as Ellinor had to leave Ford Bank, a home at a distance might be more agreeable to her, and she went on to plan that they should live together, if possible, on her earnings, and the small income that would be Ellinor's. Miss Monro loved her pupil so dearly, that, if her own pleasure only were to be consulted, this projected life would be more agreeable to her than if Mr. Wilkins's legacy had set her in independence, with Ellinor away from her, married, and with interests in which her former governess had but little part.

As soon as Mr. Ness had left her, Ellinor rang the bell, and startled the servant who answered it by her sudden sharp desire to have the horses at the door as soon as possible, and to tell Dixon to be ready to go out with her.

She felt that she must speak to him, and in her nervous state she wanted to be out on the free broad common, where no one could notice or remark their talk. It was long since she had ridden, and much wonder was excited by the sudden movement in kitchen and stable-yard. But Dixon went gravely about his work of preparation, saying nothing.

They rode pretty hard till they reached Monk's Heath, six or seven miles away from Hamley. Ellinor had previously determined that here she would talk over the plan Mr. Ness had proposed to her with Dixon; and he seemed to understand her without any words passing between them. When she reined in he rode up to her, and met the gaze of her sad eyes with sympathetic, wistful silence.

"Dixon," said she, "they say I must leave Ford Bank."

"I was afeared on it, from all I've heerd say i' the town since the master's death."

"Then you've heard—then you know—that papa has left hardly any money—my poor dear Dixon, you won't have your legacy, and I never thought of that before!"

"Never heed, never heed," said he eagerly; "I couldn't have touched it if it had been there, for the taking it would ha' seemed too like "—— "Blood-money", he was going to say, but he stopped in time. She guessed the meaning, though not the word he would have used.

"No, not that," said she; "his will was dated years before. But oh, Dixon, what must I do? They will make me leave Ford Bank, I see. I think the trustees have half let it already."

"But you'll have the rent on't, I reckon?" asked he anxiously. "I've many a time heerd 'em say as it was settled on the missus first, and then on you."

"Oh, yes, it is not that; but you know, under the beech-tree "——

"Ay!" said he heavily. "It's been oftentimes on my mind, waking, and I think there's ne'er a night as I don't dream of it."

"But how can I leave it?" Ellinor cried. "They may do a hundred things—may dig up the shrubbery. Oh! Dixon, I feel as if it was sure to be found out! Oh! Dixon, I cannot bear any more blame on papa—it will kill me—and such a dreadful thing, too!"

Dixon's face fell into the lines of habitual pain that it had always assumed of late years, whenever he was thinking or remembering anything.

"They must ne'er ha' reason to speak ill of the dead, that's for certain," said he. "The Wilkinses have been respected in Hamley all my lifetime, and all my father's before me, and—surely, missy, there's ways and means of tying tenants up from alterations both in the house and out of it; and I'd beg the trustees, or whatever they're called, to be very particular, if I was you, and not have a thing touched either in the house, or the gardens, or the meadows, or the stables. I think, wi' a word from you, they'd maybe keep me on i' the stables, and I could look after things a bit; and the Day o' Judgment will come at last, when all our secrets will be made known wi'out our having the trouble and the shame o' telling 'em. I'm getting rayther tired o' this world, Miss Ellinor."

"Don't talk so," said Ellinor tenderly. 'I know how sad it is, but, oh! remember how I shall want a friend when you're gone, to advise me as you have done to-day. You're not feeling ill, Dixon, are you?" she continued anxiously.

"No; I'm hearty enough, and likely for t' live. Father was eighty-one, and mother above the seventies, when they died. It's only my heart as is got to feel so heavy; and as for that matter, so is yours, I'll be bound. And it's a comfort to us both if we can serve him as is dead by any care of ours, for he were such a bright, handsome lad, with such a cheery face, as never should ha' known shame."

They rode on without much more speaking. Ellinor was

silently planning for Dixon, and he, not caring to look forward to the future, was bringing up before his fancy the time, thirty years ago, when he had first entered the elder Mr. Wilkins's service as stable-lad, and pretty Molly, the scullery-maid, was his daily delight. Pretty Molly lay buried in Hamley churchyard, and few living, except Dixon, could have gone straight to her grave.

CHAPTER XI

In a few days, Miss Monro obtained a most satisfactory reply to her letter of inquiries as to whether a daily governess could find employment in East Chester. For once, the application seemed to have come just at the right time. The canons were most of them married men, with young families; those at present in residence welcomed the idea of such instruction as Miss Monro could offer for their children, and could almost answer for their successors in office. This was a great step gained. Miss Monro, the daughter of a precentor to this very cathedral, had a secret unwillingness to being engaged as a teacher by any wealthy tradesman there; but to be received into the canons' families, in almost any capacity, was like going home. Moreover, besides the empty honour of the thing, there were many small pieces of patronage in the gift of the Chapter—such as a small house opening on to the Close, which had formerly belonged to the verger, but which was now vacant, and was offered to Miss Monro at a nominal rent.

Ellinor had once more sunk into her old depressed, passive state; Mr. Ness and Miss Monro, modest and undecided as they both were in general, had to fix and arrange everything for her. Her great interest seemed to be in the old servant Dixon, and her great pleasure to lie in seeing him, and talking over old times; so her two friends talked about her, little knowing what a bitter, stinging pain

her "pleasure" was. In vain Ellinor tried to plan how they could take Dixon with them to East Chester. If he had been a woman it would have been a feasible step; but they were only to keep one servant, and Dixon, capable and versatile as he was, would not do for that servant. All this was what passed through Ellinor's mind: it is still a question whether Dixon would have felt his love of his native place, with all its associations and his remembrances, or his love for Ellinor, the stronger. But he was not put to the proof; he was only told that he must quit her service; and, seeing Ellinor's extreme grief at the idea of their separation, he set himself to comfort her by every means in his power, reminding her, with tender choice of words, how necessary it was that he should remain on the spot, in Mr. Osbaldistone's service, in order to frustrate, by any small influence he might have, every project of alteration in the garden that contained the dreadful secret. He persisted in this view, though Ellinor repeated, with pertinacious anxiety, the care which Mr. Johnson had taken, in drawing up the lease, to provide against any change or alteration being made in the present disposition of the house or grounds.

People in general were rather astonished at the eagerness Miss Wilkins showed to sell all the Ford Bank furniture. Even Miss Monro was a little scandalised at this want of sentiment, although she said nothing about it; indeed justified the step, by telling every one how wisely Ellinor was acting, as the large, handsome tables and chairs would be very much out of place and keeping in the small, oddly-shaped rooms of their future home in East Chester Close. None knew how strong was the instinct of self-preservation, it may almost be called, which impelled Ellinor to shake off, at any cost of present pain, the incubus of a terrible remembrance. She wanted to go into an unhaunted dwelling in a free, unknown country—she felt as if it was her only chance of sanity. Sometimes, she thought her senses would not hold together till the time when all these arrangements were ended. But she did not speak to any one about her feelings,

poor child; to whom could she speak on the subject but to Dixon? Nor did she define them to herself. All she knew was, that she was as nearly going mad as possible; and, if she did, she feared that she might betray her father's guilt. All this time she never cried, or varied from her dull, passive demeanour. And they were blessed tears of relief that she shed when Miss Monro, herself weeping bitterly, told her to put her head out of the post-chaise window, for at the next turning of the road they would catch the last glimpse of Hamley church spire.

Late one October evening, Ellinor had her first sight of East Chester Close, where she was to pass the remainder of her life. Miss Monro had been backwards and forwards between Hamley and East Chester more than once, while Ellinor remained at the Parsonage; so she had not only the pride of proprietorship in the whole of the beautiful city, but something of the desire of hospitably welcoming Ellinor to their joint future home.

"Look! the fly must take us a long round, because of our luggage; but behind these high old walls are the canons' gardens. That high-pitched roof, with the clumps of stone-crop on the walls near it, is Canon Wilson's, whose four little girls I am to teach. Hark! the great cathedral clock! How proud I used to be of its great boom when I was a child! I thought all the other church-clocks in the town sounded so shrill and poor after that, which I considered mine especially. There are rooks flying home to the elms in the Close. I wonder if they are the same that used to be there when I was a girl. They say the rook is a very long-lived bird, and I feel as if I could swear to the way they are cawing. Ay, you may smile, Ellinor, but I understand now those lines of Gray's you used to say so prettily—

> 'I feel the gales that from ye blow
> A momentary bliss bestow,
> And breathe a second spring.'

Now, dear, you must get out. This flagged walk leads to

our front-door; but our back-rooms, which are the pleasantest, look on to the Close, and the cathedral, and the lime-tree walk, and the deanery, and the rookery."

It was a mere slip of a house; the kitchen being wisely placed close to the front-door, and so reserving the pretty view for the little dining-room, out of which a glass-door opened into a small walled-in garden, which had again an entrance into the Close. Upstairs was a bedroom to the front, which Miss Monro had taken for herself, because, as she said, she had old associations with the back of every house in the High Street, while Ellinor mounted to the pleasant chamber above the tiny drawing-room, both of which looked on to the vast and solemn cathedral, and the peaceful dignified Close. East Chester Cathedral is Norman, with a low, massive tower, a grand, majestic nave, and a choir full of stately historic tombs. The whole city is so quiet and decorous a place, that the perpetual daily chants and hymns of praise seemed to sound far and wide over the roofs of the houses. Ellinor soon became a regular attendant at all the morning- and evening-services. The sense of worship calmed and soothed her aching, weary heart, and, to be punctual to the cathedral hours, she roused and exerted herself, when probably nothing else would have been sufficient to this end.

By-and-by, Miss Monro formed many acquaintances; she picked up, or was picked up by, old friends and the descendants of old friends. The grave and kindly canons, whose children she taught, called upon her with their wives, and talked over the former deans and chapters, of whom she had both a personal and traditional knowledge; and, as they walked away, they talked about her silent, delicate-looking friend Miss Wilkins, and perhaps planned some little present out of their fruitful garden or bounteous stores, which should make Miss Monro's table a little more tempting to one apparently so frail as Ellinor; for the household was always spoken of as belonging to Miss Monro, the active and prominent person. By-and-by, Ellinor herself won her way

to their hearts, not by words or deeds, but by her sweet looks and meek demeanour, as they marked her regular attendance at the cathedral services; and, when they heard of her constant visits to a certain parochial school, and of her being sometimes seen carrying a little covered basin to the cottages of the poor, they began to try and tempt her, with more urgent words, to accompany Miss Monro in her frequent tea-drinkings at their houses. The old dean, that courteous gentleman and good Christian, had early become great friends with Ellinor. He would watch at the windows of his great vaulted library till he saw her emerge from the garden into the Close, and then open the deanery door, and join her, she softly adjusting the measure of her pace to his. The time of his departure from East Chester became a great blank in her life, although she would never accept, or allow Miss Monro to accept, his repeated invitations to go and pay him a visit at his country-place. Indeed, having once tasted comparative peace again in East Chester Cathedral Close, it seemed as though she was afraid of ever venturing out of those calm precincts. All Mr. Ness's invitations to visit him at his parsonage at Hamley were declined, although he was welcomed at Miss Monro's on the occasion of his annual visit, by every means in their power. He slept at one of the canon's vacant houses, and lived with his two friends, who made a yearly festivity, to the best of their means, in his honour, inviting such of the cathedral clergy as were in residence, or, if they failed, condescending to the town clergy. Their friends knew well that no presents were so acceptable as those sent while Mr. Ness was with them; and from the dean, who would send them a hamper of choice fruit and flowers from Oxton Park, down to the curate, who worked in the same schools as Ellinor, and who was a great fisher, and caught splendid trout—all did their best to help them to give a welcome to the only visitor they ever had. The only visitor they ever had—as far as the stately gentry knew. There was one, however, who came as often as his master could give him a holiday long enough to undertake a

journey to so distant a place; but few knew of his being a guest at Miss Monro's, though his welcome there was not less hearty than Mr. Ness's—this was Dixon. Ellinor had convinced him that he could give her no greater pleasure at any time than by allowing her to frank him to and from East Chester. Whenever he came they were together the greater part of the day; she taking him hither and thither to see all the sights that she thought would interest or please him; but they spoke very little to each other during all this companionship. Miss Monro had much more to say to him. She questioned him right and left, whenever Ellinor was out of the room. She learnt that the house at Ford Bank was splendidly furnished, and no money spared on the garden; that the eldest Miss Hanbury was very well married; that Brown had succeeded to Jones in the haberdasher's shop. Then she hesitated a little before making her next inquiry—

"I suppose Mr. Corbet never comes to the Parsonage now?"

"No, not he. I don't think as how Mr. Ness would have him; but they write letters to each other by times. Old Job—you'll recollect old Job, ma'am, he that gardened for Mr. Ness, and waited in the parlour, when there was company—did say as one day he heard them speaking about Mr. Corbet; and he's a grand counsellor now—one of them as goes about at assize-time, and speaks in a wig."

"A barrister, you mean," said Miss Monro.

"Ay; and he's something more than that, though I can't rightly remember what."

Ellinor could have told them both. They had the *Times* lent to them on the second day after publication by one of their friends in the Close; and Ellinor, watching till Miss Monro's eyes were otherwise engaged, always turned with trembling hands and a beating heart to the reports of the various courts of law. In them she found—at first rarely—the name she sought for, the name she dwelt upon, as if every letter were a study. Mr. Losh and Mr. Duncombe appeared for the plaintiff; Mr. Smythe and Mr. Corbet for

the defendant. In a year or two, that name appeared more frequently, and generally took the precedence of the other, whatever it might be; then on special occasions his speeches were reported at full length, as if his words were accounted weighty; and by-and-by she saw that he had been appointed a Queen's Counsel. And this was all she ever heard or saw about him; his once familiar name never passed her lips, except in hurried whispers to Dixon, when he came to stay with them. Ellinor had had no idea, when she parted from Mr. Corbet, how total the separation between them was henceforward to be, so much seemed left unfinished, unexplained. It was so difficult, at first, to break herself of the habit of constant mental reference to him; and for many a long year she kept thinking that surely some kind fortune would bring them together again, and all this heart-sickness and melancholy estrangement from each other would then seem to both only as an ugly dream that had passed away in the morning light.

The dean was an old man, but there was a canon who was older still, and whose death had been expected by many, and speculated upon by some, any time for ten years at least. Canon Holdsworth was too old to show active kindness to any one; the good dean's life was full of thoughtful and benevolent deeds. But he was taken, and the other left. Ellinor looked out at the vacant deanery with tearful eyes—the last thing at night, the first in the morning. But it is pretty nearly the same with church dignitaries as with kings; the dean is dead, long live the dean! A clergyman from a distant county was appointed, and all the Close was astir to learn and hear every particular connected with him. Luckily, he came in at the tag-end of one of the noble families in the peerage; so, at any rate, all his future associates could learn with tolerable certainty that he was forty-two years of age, married, and with eight daughters and one son. The deanery, formerly so quiet and sedate a dwelling of the one old man, was now to be filled with noise and merriment. Iron railings were being placed before three windows,

evidently to be the nursery. In the summer publicity of open windows and doors, the sound of the busy carpenters was perpetually heard all over the Close; and, by-and-by, waggon-loads of furniture and carriage-loads of people began to arrive. Neither Miss Monro nor Ellinor felt themselves of sufficient importance or station to call on the new-comers; but they were as well acquainted with the proceedings of the family as if they had been in daily intercourse; they knew that the eldest Miss Beauchamp was seventeen, and very pretty, only one shoulder was higher than the other; that she was dotingly fond of dancing, and talked a great deal in a *tête-à-tête*, but not much if her mamma was by, and never opened her lips at all if the dean was in the room; that the next sister was wonderfully clever, and was supposed to know all the governess could teach her, and to have private lessons in Greek and mathematics from her father; and so on down to the little boy at the preparatory school and the baby-girl in arms. Moreover, Miss Monro, at any rate, could have stood an examination as to the number of servants at the deanery, their division of work, and the hours of their meals. Presently, a very beautiful, haughty-looking young lady made her appearance in the Close, and in the dean's seats. She was said to be his niece, the orphan daughter of his brother, General Beauchamp, come to East Chester to reside for the necessary time before her marriage, which was to be performed in the cathedral by her uncle, the new dignitary. But as callers at the deanery did not see this beautiful bride-elect, and as the Beauchamps had not as yet fallen into habits of intimacy with any of their new acquaintances, very little was known of the circumstances of this approaching wedding beyond the particulars given above.

Ellinor and Miss Monro sat at their drawing-room window, a little shaded by the muslin curtains, watching the busy preparations for the marriage, which was to take place the next day. All morning long, hampers of fruit and flowers, boxes from the railway—for by this time East Chester had got a railway—shop messengers, hired

assistants, kept passing backwards and forwards in the busy Close. Towards afternoon the bustle subsided, the scaffolding was up, the materials for the next day's feast carried out of sight. It was to be concluded that the bride-elect was seeing to the packing of her trousseau, helped by the merry multitude of cousins, and that the servants were arranging the dinner for the day, or the breakfast for the morrow. So Miss Monro had settled it, discussing every detail and every probability, as though she were a chief actor, instead of only a distant, uncared-for spectator of the coming event. Ellinor was tired; and, now that there was nothing interesting going on, she had fallen back to her sewing, when she was startled by Miss Monro's exclamation—

"Look, look! here are two gentlemen coming along the lime-tree walk! it must be the bridegroom and his friend." Out of much sympathy, and some curiosity, Ellinor bent forward, and saw, just emerging from the shadow of the trees on to the full afternoon-sunlit pavement, Mr. Corbet and another gentleman; the former changed, worn, aged, though with still the same fine, intellectual face, leaning on the arm of the younger, taller man, and talking eagerly. The other gentleman was doubtless the bridegroom, Ellinor said to herself; and yet her prophetic heart did not believe her words. Even before the bright beauty at the deanery looked out of the great oriel window of the drawing-room, and blushed, and smiled, and kissed her hand—a gesture replied to by Mr. Corbet with much *empressement*, while the other man only took off his hat, almost as if he saw her there for the first time—Ellinor's greedy eyes watched him till he was hidden from sight in the deanery, unheeding Miss Monro's eager, incoherent sentences, in turn entreating, apologising, comforting, and upbraiding. Then she slowly turned her painful eyes upon Miss Monro's face, and moved her lips without a sound being heard, and fainted dead away. In all her life she had never done so before, and when she came round she was not like herself; in all probability the persistence and wilfulness she, who was usually so meek

and docile, showed during the next twenty-four hours, was the consequence of fever. She resolved to be present at the wedding; numbers were going; she would be unseen, unnoticed in the crowd; but, whatever befell, go she would, and neither the tears nor the prayers of Miss Monro could keep her back. She gave no reason for this determination; indeed, in all probability she had none to give; so there was no arguing the point. She was inflexible to entreaty, and no one had any authority over her, except, perhaps, distant Mr. Ness. Miss Monro had all sorts of forebodings as to the possible scenes that might come to pass. But all went on as quietly as though the fullest sympathy pervaded every individual of the great numbers assembled. No one guessed that the muffled, veiled figure, sitting in the shadow behind one of the great pillars, was that of one who had once hoped to stand at the altar with the same bridegroom, who now cast tender looks at the beautiful bride; her veil white and fairy-like, Ellinor's black and shrouding as that of any nun.

Already Mr. Corbet's name was known through the country as that of a great lawyer; people discussed his speeches and character far and wide; and the well-informed in legal gossip spoke of him as sure to be offered a judgeship at the next vacancy. So he, though grave, and middle-aged, and somewhat grey, divided attention and remark with his lovely bride, and her pretty train of cousin bridesmaids. Miss Monro need not have feared for Ellinor: she saw and heard all things as in a mist—a dream; as something she had to go through, before she could waken up to a reality of brightness in which her youth, and the hopes of her youth, should be restored, and all these weary years of dreaminess and woe should be revealed as nothing but the nightmare of a night. She sat motionless enough, still enough, Miss Monro by her, watching her as intently as a keeper watches a madman, and with the same purpose—to prevent any outburst even by bodily strength, if such restraint be needed. When all was over; when the principal personages of the ceremony had filed into the vestry to sign

their names; when the swarm of townspeople were going out as swiftly as their individual notions of the restraints of the sacred edifice permitted; when the great chords of the "Wedding March" clanged out from the organ, and the loud bells pealed overhead—Ellinor laid her hand in Miss Monro's. "Take me home," she said softly. And Miss Monro led her home, as one leads the blind.

CHAPTER XII

THERE are some people who imperceptibly float away from their youth into middle age, and thence pass into declining life with the soft and gentle motion of happy years. There are others who are whirled, in spite of themselves, down dizzy rapids of agony away from their youth at one great bound, into old age with another sudden shock; and thence into the vast, calm ocean, where there are no shore-marks to tell of time.

This last, it seemed, was to be Ellinor's lot. Her youth had gone in a single night, fifteen years ago, and now she appeared to have become an elderly woman; very still and hopeless in look and movement, but as sweet and gentle in speech and smile as ever she had been in her happiest days. All young people, when they came to know her, loved her dearly, though at first they might call her dull, and heavy to get on with; and as for children and old people, her ready watchful sympathy in their joys as well as their sorrows was an unfailing passage to their hearts. After the first great shock of Mr. Corbet's marriage was over, she seemed to pass into a greater peace than she had known for years; the last faint hope of happiness was gone—it would, perhaps, be more accurate to say, of the bright happiness she had planned for herself in her early youth. Unconsciously, she was being weaned from self-seeking in any shape, and her daily life

became, if possible, more innocent and pure and holy. One of the canons used to laugh at her for her constant attendance at all the services, and for her devotion to good works, and call her always the reverend sister. Miss Monro was a little annoyed at this faint clerical joke; Ellinor smiled quietly. Miss Monro disapproved of Ellinor's grave ways and sober severe style of dress.

"You may be as good as you like, my dear, and yet go dressed in some pretty colour, instead of those perpetual blacks and greys; and then there would be no need for me to be perpetually telling people you are only four-and-thirty (and they don't believe me, though I tell them so till I am black in the face). Or, if you would but wear a decent-shaped bonnet, instead of always wearing those poky shapes in fashion when you were seventeen."

The old canon died, and some one was to be appointed in his stead. These clerical preferments and appointments were the all-important interests to the inhabitants of the Close, and the discussion of probabilities came up invariably if any two met together in street or house, or even in the very cathedral itself. At length it was settled and announced by the higher powers. An energetic, hard-working clergyman from a distant part of the diocese, Livingstone by name, was to have the vacant canonry.

Miss Monro said that the name was somehow familiar to her; and, by degrees, she recollected the young curate who had come to inquire after Ellinor in that dreadful illness she had had at Hamley in the year 1829. Ellinor knew nothing of that visit; no more than Miss Monro did of what had passed between the two before that anxious night. Ellinor just thought it possible it might be the same Mr. Livingstone, and would rather it were not; because she did not feel as if she could bear the frequent, though not intimate, intercourse she must needs have, if such were the case, with one so closely associated with that great time of terror which she was striving to bury out of sight by every effort in her power. Miss Monro, on the contrary, was busy weaving

a romance for her pupil; she thought of the passionate interest displayed by the fair young clergyman fifteen years ago, and believed that occasionally men could be constant, and hoped that, if Mr. Livingstone were the new canon, he might prove the *rara avis* which exists but once in a century. He came, and it was the same. He looked a little stouter, a little older, but had still the gait and aspect of a young man. His smooth fair face was scarcely lined at all with any marks of care; the blue eyes looked so kindly and peaceful that Miss Monro could scarcely fancy they were the same which she had seen fast filling with tears; the bland calm look of the whole man needed the ennoblement of his evident devoutness to be raised into the type of holy innocence which some of the Roman Catholics call the "sacerdotal face." His entire soul was in his work, and he looked as little likely to step forth in the character of either a hero of romance or a faithful lover as could be imagined. Still Miss Monro was not discouraged; she remembered the warm, passionate feeling she had once seen break through the calm exterior, and she believed that what had happened once might occur again.

Of course, while all eyes were directed on the new canon, he had to learn who the possessors of those eyes were, one by one; and it was probably some time before the idea came into his mind that Miss Wilkins, the lady in black, with the sad pale face, so constant an attendant at service, so regular a visitor at the school, was the same Miss Wilkins as the bright vision of his youth. It was her sweet smile at a painstaking child that betrayed her—if, indeed, betrayal it might be called where there was no wish or effort to conceal anything. Canon Livingstone left the schoolroom almost directly, and, after being for an hour or so in his house, went out to call on Mrs. Randall, the person who knew more of her neighbours' affairs than any one in East Chester.

The next day, he called on Miss Wilkins herself. She would have been very glad if he had kept on in his ignorance; it was so keenly painful to be in the company of one the

sight of whom, even at a distance, had brought her such a keen remembrance of past misery; and, when told of his call, as she was sitting at her sewing in the dining-room, she had to nerve herself for the interview before going upstairs into the drawing-room, where he was being entertained by Miss Monro with warm demonstrations of welcome. A little contraction of the brow, a little compression of the lips, an increased pallor on Ellinor's part, was all that Miss Monro could see in her, though she had put on her glasses with foresight and intention to observe. She turned to the canon; his colour had certainly deepened as he went forwards with outstretched hand to meet Ellinor. That was all that was to be seen; but on the slight foundation of that blush Miss Monro built many castles; and when they faded away, one by one, she recognised that they were only baseless visions. She used to put the disappointment of her hopes down to Ellinor's unvaried calmness of demeanour, which might be taken for coldness of disposition; and to her steady refusal to allow Miss Monro to invite Canon Livingstone to the small teas they were in the habit of occasionally giving. Yet he persevered in his calls; about once every fortnight he came, and would sit an hour or more, looking covertly at his watch, as if, as Miss Monro shrewdly observed to herself, he did not go away at last because he wished to do so, but because he ought. Sometimes Ellinor was present, sometimes she was away; in this latter case Miss Monro thought she could detect a certain wistful watching of the door every time a noise was heard outside the room. He always avoided any reference to former days at Hamley; and that, Miss Monro feared, was a bad sign.

After this long uniformity of years without any event closely touching on Ellinor's own individual life, with the one great exception of Mr. Corbet's marriage, something happened which much affected her. Mr. Ness died suddenly at his parsonage, and Ellinor learnt it first from Mr. Brown, a clergyman, whose living was near Hamley, and who had been sent for by the Parsonage servants, as soon as they

discovered that it was not sleep, but death, that made their master so late in rising.

Mr. Brown had been appointed executor by his late friend, and wrote to tell Ellinor that, after a few legacies were paid, she was to have a life-interest in the remainder of the small property which Mr. Ness had left, and that it would be necessary for her, as the residuary legatee, to come to Hamley Parsonage as soon as convenient, to decide upon certain courses of action with regard to furniture, books, &c.

Ellinor shrank from this journey, which her love and duty towards her dead friend rendered necessary. She had scarcely left East Chester since she first arrived there, sixteen or seventeen years ago, and she was timorous about the very mode of travelling; and then to go back to Hamley, which she thought never to have seen again! She never spoke much about any feelings of her own; but Miss Monro could always read her silence, and interpreted it into pretty just and forcible words that afternoon, when Canon Livingstone called. She liked to talk about Ellinor to him, and suspected that he liked to hear. She was almost annoyed this time by the comfort he would keep giving her; there was no greater danger in travelling by railroad than by coach; a little care about certain things was required, that was all, and the average number of deaths by accidents on railroads was not greater than the average number when people travelled by coach, if you took into consideration the far greater number of travellers. Yes! returning to the deserted scenes of one's youth was very painful. . . . Had Miss Wilkins made any provision for another lady to take her place as visitor at the school? He believed it was her week. Miss Monro was out of all patience at his entire calmness and reasonableness. Later in the day she became more at peace with him, when she received a kind little note from Mrs. Forbes, a great friend of hers, and the mother of the family she was now teaching, saying that Canon Livingstone had called and told her that Ellinor had to go on a very painful journey, and that Mrs. Forbes was quite

sure Miss Monro's companionship upon it would be a great comfort to both, and that she could perfectly be set at liberty for a fortnight or so; for it would fall in admirably with the fact that "Jeanie was growing tall, and the doctor had advised sea air this spring; so a month's holiday would suit them now even better than later on." Was this going straight to Mrs. Forbes, to whom she should herself scarcely have liked to name it, the act of a good, thoughtful man, or of a lover? questioned Miss Monro; but she could not answer her own inquiry, and had to be very grateful for the deed, without accounting for the motives.

A coach met the train at a station about ten miles from Hamley, and Dixon was at the inn where the coach stopped, ready to receive them.

The old man was almost in tears at the sight of them again in a familiar place. He had put on his Sunday clothes to do them honour; and to conceal his agitation he kept up a pretended bustle about their luggage. To the indignation of the inn-porters, who were of a later generation, he would wheel it himself to the Parsonage; though he broke down from fatigue once or twice on the way, and had to stand and rest, his ladies waiting by his side, and making remarks on the alterations of houses and the places of trees, in order to give him ample time to recruit himself; for there was no one to wait for them and give them a welcome to the Parsonage, which was to be their temporary home. The respectful servants, in deep mourning, had everything prepared, and gave Ellinor a note from Mr. Brown, saying that he purposely refrained from disturbing them that day after their long journey, but would call on the morrow, and tell them of the arrangements he had thought of making, always subject to Miss Wilkins's approval.

These were simple enough; certain legal forms to be gone through, any selections from books or furniture to be made, and the rest to be sold by auction as speedily as convenient, as the successor to the living might wish to have repairs and alterations effected in the old parsonage. For

some days Ellinor employed herself in business in the house, never going out except to church. Miss Monro, on the contrary, strolled about everywhere, noticing all the alterations in place and people, which were never improvements in her opinion. Ellinor had plenty of callers (her tenants, Mr. and Mrs. Osbaldistone, among others); but, excepting in rare cases—most of these belonged to humble life—she declined to see any one, as she had business enough on her hands: sixteen years makes a great difference in any set of people. The old acquaintances of her father in his better days were almost all dead or had removed; there were one or two remaining, and these Ellinor received; one or two more, old and infirm, confined to their houses, she planned to call upon before leaving Hamley. Every evening, when Dixon had done his work at Mr. Osbaldistone's, he came up to the parsonage, ostensibly to help her in moving or packing books, but really because these two clung to each other—were bound to each other by a bond never to be spoken about. It was understood between them that, once before Ellinor left, she should go and see the old place, Ford Bank. Not to go into the house, though Mr. and Mrs. Osbaldistone had begged her to name her own time for revisiting it, when they and their family would be absent; but to see all the gardens and grounds once more—a solemn, miserable visit, which, because of the very misery it involved, appeared to Ellinor to be an imperative duty.

Dixon and she talked together as she sat making a catalogue one evening in the old low-browed library; the casement windows were open into the garden, and the May showers had brought out the scents of the new-leaved sweet-briar bush just below. Beyond the garden hedge the grassy meadows sloped away down to the river; the Parsonage was so much raised that, sitting in the house, you could see over the boundary hedge. Men with instruments were busy in the meadow. Ellinor, pausing in her work, asked Dixon what they were doing.

"Them's the people for the new railway," said he.

"Nought would satisfy the Hamley folk but to have a railway all to themselves — coaches isn't good enough now-a-days."

He spoke with a tone of personal offence natural to a man who had passed all his life among horses, and considered railway-engines as their despicable rivals, conquering only by stratagem.

By-and-by Ellinor passed on to a subject the consideration of which she had repeatedly urged upon Dixon, and entreated him to come and form one of their household at East Chester. He was growing old, she thought, older even in looks and feelings than in years, and she would make him happy and comfortable in his declining years if he would but come and pass them under her care. The addition which Mr. Ness's bequest made to her income would enable her to do not only this, but to relieve Miss Monro of her occupation of teaching; which, at the years she had arrived at, was becoming burdensome. When she proposed the removal to Dixon, he shook his head.

"It's not that I don't thank you, and kindly, too; but I'm too old to go chopping and changing."

"But it would be no change to come back to me, Dixon," said Ellinor.

"Yes, it would. I were born i' Hamley, and it's i' Hamley I reckon to die."

On her urging him a little more, it came out that he had a strong feeling that, if he did not watch the spot where the dead man lay buried, the whole would be discovered; and that this dread of his had often poisoned the pleasure of his visit to East Chester.

"I don't rightly know how it is, for I sometimes think, if it wasn't for you, missy, I should be glad to have made it all clear before I go; and yet at times I dream, or it comes into my head as I lie awake with the rheumatics, that some one is there, digging; or that I hear 'em cutting down the tree; and then I get up and look out of the loft window—you'll mind the window over the stables, as looks into the garden,

all covered over wi' the leaves of the jargonelle pear-tree? That were my room when first I come as stable-boy, and, tho' Mr. Osbaldistone would fain give me a warmer one, I allays tell him I like th' old place best. And by times I've getten up five or six times a-night, to make sure as there was no one at work under the tree."

Ellinor shivered a little. He saw it, and restrained himself in the relief he was receiving from imparting his superstitious fancies.

"You see, missy, I could never rest a-nights, if I didn't feel as if I kept the secret in my hand, and held it tight day and night, so as I could open my hand at any minute and see as it was there. No! my own little missy will let me come and see her now and again, and I know as I can allays ask her for what I want; and, if it please God to lay me by, I shall tell her so, and she'll see as I want for nothing. But somehow I could ne'er bear leaving Hamley. You shall come and follow me to my grave when my time comes."

"Don't talk so, please, Dixon," said she.

"Nay, it'll be a mercy when I can lay me down and sleep in peace: though I sometimes fear as peace will not come to me even there." He was going out of the room, and was now more talking to himself than to her. "They say blood will out; and, if it weren't for her part in it, I could wish for a clean breast before I die."

She did not hear the latter part of this mumbled sentence. She was looking at a letter just brought in and requiring an immediate answer. It was from Mr. Brown. Notes from him were of daily occurrence, but this contained an open letter, the writing of which was strangely familiar to her—it did not need the signature "Ralph Corbet," to tell her whom the letter came from. For some moments she could not read the words. They expressed a simple enough request, and were addressed to the auctioneer who was to dispose of the rather valuable library of the late Mr. Ness, and whose name had been advertised in connection with the sale, in the *Athenæum*, and other similar papers. To him

Mr. Corbet wrote, saying that he should be unable to be present when the books were sold, but that he wished to be allowed to buy in, at any price decided upon, a certain rare folio edition of Virgil, bound in parchment, and with notes in Italian. The book was fully described. Though no Latin scholar, Ellinor knew the book well—remembered its look from old times, and could instantly have laid her hand upon it. The auctioneer had sent the request on to his employer, Mr. Brown. That gentleman applied to Ellinor for her consent. She saw that the fact of the intended sale must be all that Mr. Corbet was aware of, and that he could not know to whom the books belonged. She chose out the book, and wrapped and tied it up with trembling hands. *He* might be the person to untie the knot. It was strangely familiar to her love, after so many years, to be brought into thus much contact with him. She wrote a short note to Mr. Brown, in which she requested him to say, as though from himself, and without any mention of her name, that he, as executor, requested Mr. Corbet's acceptance of the Virgil, as a remembrance of his former friend and tutor. Then she rang the bell, and gave the letter and parcel to the servant.

Again alone, and Mr. Corbet's open letter on the table! She took it up and looked at it, till the letters dazzled crimson on the white paper. Her life rolled backwards, and she was a girl again. At last she roused herself; but instead of destroying the note—it was long years since all her love-letters from him had been returned to the writer—she unlocked her little writing-case again, and placed this letter carefully down at the bottom, among the dead rose-leaves which embalmed the note from her father, found after his death under his pillow, the little golden curl of her sister's, the half-finished sewing of her mother's.

The shabby writing-case itself was given her by her father long ago, and had since been taken with her everywhere. To be sure, her changes of place had been but few; but, if she had gone to Nova Zembla, the sight of that little leather

box on awaking from her first sleep, would have given her a sense of home. She locked the case up again, and felt all the richer for that morning.

A day or two afterwards she left Hamley. Before she went she compelled herself to go round the gardens and grounds of Ford Bank. She had made Mrs. Osbaldistone understand that it would be painful for her to re-enter the house; but Mr. Osbaldistone accompanied her in her walk.

"You see how literally we have obeyed the clause in the lease which ties us out from any alterations," said he, smiling. "We are living in a tangled thicket of wood. I must confess that I should have liked to cut down a good deal; but we do not do even the requisite thinnings without making the proper application for leave to Mr. Johnson. In fact, your old friend Dixon is jealous of every pea-stick the gardener cuts. I never met with so faithful a fellow. A good enough servant, too, in his way; but somewhat too old-fashioned for my wife and daughters, who complain of his being surly now and then."

"You are not thinking of parting with him?" said Ellinor, jealous for Dixon.

"Oh, no; he and I are capital friends. And I believe Mrs. Osbaldistone herself would never consent to his leaving us. But some ladies, you know, like a little more subserviency in manner than our friend Dixon can boast."

Ellinor made no reply. They were entering the painted flower-garden, hiding the ghastly memory. She could not speak. She felt as if, with all her striving, she could not move—just as one does in a nightmare—but she was past the place even as this terror came to its acme; and, when she came to herself, Mr. Osbaldistone was still blandly talking, and saying—

"It is like a reward for our obedience to your wishes, Miss Wilkins; for, if the projected railway passes through the ash-field yonder, we should have been perpetually troubled with the sight of the trains; indeed, the sound would have been much more distinct than it will be now coming through

the interlacing branches. Then you will not go in, Miss Wilkins? Mrs. Osbaldistone desired me to say how happy ——Ah! I can understand such feelings——Certainly, certainly; it is so much the shortest way to the town, that we elder ones always go through the stable-yard; for young people, it is perhaps not quite so desirable. Ha! Dixon," he continued, "on the watch for the 'Miss Ellinor' we so often hear of! This old man," he continued to Ellinor, "is never satisfied with the seat of our young ladies, always comparing their way of riding with that of a certain missy"——

"I cannot help it, sir; they've quite a different style of hand, and sit all lumpish-like. Now, Miss Ellinor, there"——

"Hush, Dixon," she said, suddenly aware of why the old servant was not popular with his mistress. "I suppose I may be allowed to ask for Dixon's company for an hour or so; we have something to do together, before we leave."

The consent given, the two walked away, as by previous appointment, to Hamley churchyard, where he was to point out to her the exact spot where he wished to be buried. Trampling over the long, rank grass, but avoiding passing directly over any of the thickly-strewn graves, he made straight for one spot—a little space of unoccupied ground close by, where Molly, the pretty scullery-maid, lay—

Sacred to the Memory of
Mary Greaves,
Born 1797. Died 1818.
"We part to meet again."

"I put this stone up over her with my first savings," said he, looking at it; and then, pulling out his knife, he began to clean out the letters. "I said then as I would lie by her. And it'll be a comfort to think you'll see me laid here. I trust no one'll be so crabbed as to take a fancy to this 'ere spot of ground."

Ellinor grasped eagerly at the only pleasure which her

money enabled her to give to the old man; and promised him that she would take care and buy the right to that particular piece of ground. This was evidently a gratification Dixon had frequently yearned after; he kept saying, "I'm greatly obleeged to ye, Miss Ellinor. I may say I'm truly obleeged." And when he saw them off by the coach the next day, his last words were, "I cannot justly say how greatly I'm obleeged to you for that matter of the churchyard." It was a much more easy affair to give Miss Monro some additional comforts; she was as cheerful as ever; still working away at her languages in any spare time, but confessing that she was tired of the perpetual teaching in which her life had been spent during the last thirty years. Ellinor was now enabled to set her at liberty from this, and she accepted the kindness from her former pupil with as much simple gratitude as that with which a mother receives a favour from a child. "If Ellinor were but married to Canon Livingstone, I should be happier than I have ever been since my father died," she used to say to herself in the solitude of her bed-chamber; for talking aloud had become her wont in the early years of her isolated life as a governess. "And yet," she went on, "I don't know what I should do without her; it is lucky for me that things are not in my hands, for a pretty mess I should make of them, one way or another. Dear! how old Mrs. Cadogan used to hate that word 'mess,' and correct her granddaughters for using it right before my face, when I knew I had said it myself only the moment before! Well! those days are all over now. God be thanked!"

In spite of being glad that "things were not in her hands," Miss Monro tried to take affairs into her charge by doing all she could towards persuading Ellinor to allow her to invite the canon to their "little sociable teas." The most provoking part was, that she was sure he would have come if he had been asked; but she could never get leave to do so. "Of course no man could go on for ever and ever without encouragement," as she confided to herself in a plaintive tone of voice;

and by-and-by many people were led to suppose that the bachelor canon was paying attention to Miss Forbes, the eldest daughter of the family to which the delicate Jeanie belonged. It was, perhaps, with the Forbeses that both Miss Monro and Ellinor were the most intimate of all the families in East Chester. Mrs. Forbes was a widow lady of good means, with a large family of pretty, delicate daughters. She herself belonged to one of the great houses in ——shire, but had married into Scotland; so, after her husband's death, it was the most natural thing in the world that she should settle in East Chester; and one after another of her daughters had become, first Miss Monro's pupil, and afterwards her friend. Mrs. Forbes herself had always been strongly attracted by Ellinor; but it was long before she could conquer the timid reserve by which Miss Wilkins was hedged round. It was Miss Monro, who was herself incapable of jealousy, who persevered in praising them to one another, and in bringing them together; and now Ellinor was as intimate and familiar in Mrs. Forbes's household as she ever could be with any family not her own.

Mrs. Forbes was considered to be a little fanciful as to illness; but it was no wonder, remembering how many sisters she had lost by consumption. Miss Monro had often grumbled at the way in which her pupils were made irregular for very trifling causes. But no one so alarmed as she, when, in the autumn succeeding Mr. Ness's death, Mrs. Forbes remarked to her on Ellinor's increased delicacy of appearance, and shortness of breathing. From that time forwards, she worried Ellinor (if any one so sweet and patient could ever have been worried) with respirators and precautions. Ellinor submitted to all her friend's wishes and cares, sooner than make her anxious, and remained a prisoner in the house through the whole of November. Then Miss Monro's anxiety took another turn. Ellinor's appetite and spirits failed her—not at all an unnatural consequence of so many weeks' confinement to the house. A plan was started, quite suddenly, one morning in December, that met

with approval from every one but Ellinor, who was, however, by this time too languid to make much resistance.

Mrs. Forbes and her daughters were going to Rome for three or four months, so as to avoid the trying east winds of spring; why should not Miss Wilkins go with them? They urged it, and Miss Monro urged it, though with a little private sinking of the heart, at the idea of the long separation from one who was almost like a child to her. Ellinor was, as it were, lifted off her feet and borne away by the unanimous opinion of others—the doctor included—who decided that such a step was highly desirable, if not absolutely necessary. She knew that she had only a life-interest both in her father's property and in that bequeathed to her by Mr. Ness. Hitherto she had not felt much troubled by this, as she had supposed that in the natural course of events she should survive Miss Monro and Dixon, both of whom she looked upon as dependent upon her. All she had to bequeath to the two was the small savings, which would not nearly suffice for both purposes, especially considering that Miss Monro had given up her teaching, and that both she and Dixon were passing into years.

Before Ellinor left England, she had made every arrangement for the contingency of her death abroad that Mr. Johnson could suggest. She had written and sent a long letter to Dixon; and a shorter one was left in charge of Canon Livingstone (she dared not hint at the possibility of her dying to Miss Monro), to be sent to the old man.

As they drove out of the King's Cross station, they passed a gentleman's carriage entering. Ellinor saw a bright, handsome lady and a nurse and baby inside, and a gentleman sitting by them whose face she could never forget. It was Mr. Corbet taking his wife and child to the railway. They were going on a Christmas visit to East Chester deanery. He had been leaning back, not noticing the passers-by, not attending to the other inmates of the carriage, probably absorbed in the consideration of some law-case. Such were

the casual glimpses Ellinor had of one with whose life she had once thought herself bound up.

Who so proud as Miss Monro when a foreign letter came? Her correspondent was not particularly graphic in her descriptions, nor were there any adventures to be described, nor was the habit of mind of Ellinor such as to make her clear and definite in her own impressions of what she saw; and her natural reserve kept her from being fluent in communicating them even to Miss Monro. But that lady would have been pleased to read aloud these letters to the assembled dean and canons, and would not have been surprised, if they had invited her to the chapter-house for that purpose. To her circle of untravelled ladies, ignorant of Murray, but laudably desirous of information, all Ellinor's historical reminiscences and rather formal details were really interesting. There was no railroad in those days between Lyons and Marseilles, so their progress was slow, and the passage of letters to and fro, when they had arrived in Rome, long and uncertain. But all seemed going on well. Ellinor spoke of herself as in better health; and Canon Livingstone (between whom and Miss Monro great intimacy had sprung up since Ellinor had gone away, and Miss Monro could ask him to tea) confirmed this report of Miss Wilkins's health from a letter which he had received from Mrs. Forbes. Curiosity about that letter was Miss Monro's torment. What could they have had to write to each other about? It was a very odd proceeding; although the Livingstones and Forbeses were distantly related, after the manner of Scotland. Could it have been that he had offered to Euphemia, after all, and that her mother had answered; or, possibly, there was a letter from Effie herself, enclosed. It was a pity for Miss Monro's peace of mind that she did not ask him straight away. She would then have learnt what Canon Livingstone had no thought of concealing, that Mrs. Forbes had written solely to give him some fuller directions about certain charities than she had had time to think about in the hurry of starting. As it was, and when, a little later

on, she heard him speak of the possibility of his going himself to Rome, as soon as his term of residence was over, in time for the Carnival, she gave up her fond project in despair, and felt very much like a child whose house of bricks had been knocked down by the unlucky waft of some passing petticoat.

Meanwhile, the entire change of scene brought on the exquisite refreshment of entire change of thought. Ellinor had not been able so completely to forget her past life for many years; it was like a renewing of her youth, cut so suddenly short by the shears of Fate. Ever since that night, she had had to rouse herself on awakening in the morning into a full comprehension of the great cause she had for much fear and heavy grief. Now, when she wakened in her little room, fourth *piano*, No. 36, Babuino, she saw the strange, pretty things around her, and her mind went off into pleasant wonder and conjecture, happy recollections of the day before, and pleasant anticipations of the day to come. Latent in Ellinor was her father's artistic temperament; everything new and strange was a picture and a delight; the merest group in the street, a Roman *facchino*, with his cloak draped over his shoulder, a girl going to market or carrying her pitcher back from the fountain, everything and every person that presented it or himself to her senses, gave them a delicious shock, as if it were something strangely familiar from Pinelli, but unseen by her mortal eyes before. She forgot her despondency, her ill-health disappeared as if by magic; Mrs. Forbes and her daughters, who had taken the pensive, drooping invalid with them as a companion out of kindness of heart, found themselves amply rewarded by the sight of her amended health, and her keen enjoyment of everything, and the half-quaint, half-naïve expressions of her pleasure.

So March came round; Lent was late that year. The great nosegays of violets and camellias were for sale at the corner of the Condotti, and the revellers had no difficulty in procuring much rarer flowers for the belles of the Corso.

The embassies had their balconies; the attachés of the Russian Embassy threw their light and lovely presents at every pretty girl, or suspicion of a pretty girl, who passed slowly in her carriage, covered over with her white domino, and holding her wire mask as a protection to her face from the showers of lime *confetti*, which otherwise would have been enough to blind her; Mrs. Forbes had her own hired balcony, as became a wealthy and respectable Englishwoman. The girls had a great basket, full of bouquets with which to pelt their friends in the crowd below; a store of *moccoletti* lay piled on the table behind, for it was the last day of Carnival, and as soon as dusk came on the tapers were to be lighted, to be as quickly extinguished by every means in every one's power. The crowd below was at its wildest pitch; the rows of stately *contadini* alone sitting immovable as their possible ancestors, the senators who received Brennus and his Gauls. Masks and white dominoes, foreign gentlemen, and the riff-raff of the city, slow-driving carriages, showers of flowers, most of them faded by this time, every one shouting and struggling at that wild pitch of excitement which may so soon turn into fury. The Forbes girls had given place at the window to their mother and Ellinor, who were gazing, half-amused, half-terrified, at the mad parti-coloured movement below; when a familiar face looked up, smiling a recognition; and "How shall I get to you?" was asked, in English, by the well-known voice of Canon Livingstone. They saw him disappear under the balcony on which they were standing, but it was some time before he made his appearance in their room. And when he did, he was almost overpowered with greetings; so glad were they to see an East Chester face.

"When did you come? Where are you? What a pity you did not come sooner! It is so long since we have heard anything; do tell us everything! It is three weeks since we have had any letters; those tiresome boats have been so irregular because of the weather." "How was everybody —Miss Monro in particular?" Ellinor asks.

He, quietly smiling, replied to their questions by slow degrees. He had only arrived the night before, and had been hunting for them all day; but no one could give him any distinct intelligence as to their whereabouts in all the noise and confusion of the place, especially as they had their only English servant with them, and the canon was not strong in his Italian. He was not sorry he had missed all but this last day of Carnival, for he was half blinded and wholly deafened, as it was. He was at the "Angleterre"; he had left East Chester about a week ago; he had letters for all of them, but had not dared to bring them through the crowd, for fear of having his pocket picked. Miss Monro was very well, but very uneasy at not having heard from Ellinor for so long; the irregularity of the boats must be telling both ways, for their English friends were full of wonder at not hearing from Rome. And then followed some well-deserved abuse of the Roman post, and some suspicion of the carelessness with which Italian servants posted English letters. All these answers were satisfactory enough; yet Mrs. Forbes thought she saw a latent uneasiness in Canon Livingstone's manner, and fancied once or twice that he hesitated in replying to Ellinor's questions. But there was no being quite sure in the increasing darkness, which prevented countenances from being seen; nor in the constant interruptions and screams which were going on in the small, crowded room, as wafting handkerchiefs, puffs of wind, or veritable extinguishers, fastened to long sticks, and coming from nobody knew where, put out taper after taper as fast as they were lighted.

"You will come home with us," said Mrs. Forbes. "I can only offer you cold meat with tea; our cook is gone out, this being a universal *festa;* but we cannot part with an old friend for any scruples as to the commissariat."

"Thank you. I should have invited myself, if you had not been good enough to ask me."

When they had all arrived at their apartment in the Babuino (Canon Livingstone had gone round to fetch the

letters with which he was intrusted), Mrs. Forbes was confirmed in her supposition that he had something particular and not very pleasant to say to Ellinor, by the rather grave and absent manner in which he awaited her return from taking off her out-of-door things. He broke off, indeed, in his conversation with Mrs. Forbes to go and meet Ellinor, and to lead her into the most distant window before he delivered her letters.

"From what you said in the balcony yonder, I fear you have not received your home letters regularly?"

"No!" replied she, startled and trembling, she hardly knew why.

"No more has Miss Monro heard from you; nor, I believe, has some one else who expected to hear. Your man of business—I forget his name——"

"My man of business! Something has gone wrong, Mr. Livingstone. Tell me—I want to know. I have been expecting it—only tell me!" She sat down suddenly, as white as ashes.

"Dear Miss Wilkins, I'm afraid it is painful enough; but you are fancying it worse than it is. All your friends are quite well; but an old servant"——

"Well!" she said, seeing his hesitation, and leaning forwards and gripping his arm.

"Is taken up on a charge of manslaughter or murder. Oh! Mrs. Forbes, come here!"

For Ellinor had fainted, falling forwards on the arm she had held. When she came round, she was lying half undressed on her bed; they were giving her tea in spoonfuls.

"I must get up," she moaned. "I must go home."

"You must lie still," said Mrs. Forbes firmly.

"You don't know. I must go home," she repeated; and she tried to sit up, but fell back helpless. Then she did not speak, but lay and thought. "Will you bring me some meat?" she whispered. "And some wine?" They brought her meat and wine; she ate, though she was choking. "Now, please bring me my letters, and leave me

alone; and after that I should like to speak to Canon Livingstone. Don't let him go, please. I won't be long—half-an-hour, I think. Only let me be alone."

There was a hurried, feverish sharpness in her tone that made Mrs. Forbes very anxious; but she judged it best to comply with her requests.

The letters were brought, the lights were arranged so that she could read them lying on her bed; and they left her. Then she got up and stood on her feet, dizzy enough, her arms clasped at the top of her head, her eyes dilated and staring as if looking at some great horror. But after a few minutes she sat down suddenly, and began to read. Letters were evidently missing. Some had been sent by an opportunity that had been delayed on the journey, and had not yet arrived in Rome. Others had been despatched by the post, but the severe weather, the unusual snow, had, in those days, before the railway was made between Lyons and Marseilles, put a stop to many a traveller's plans, and had rendered the transmission of the mail extremely uncertain; so, much of that intelligence which Miss Monro had evidently considered as certain to be known to Ellinor was entirely matter of conjecture, and could only be guessed at from what was told in these letters. One was from Mr. Johnson, one from Mr. Brown, one from Miss Monro; of course the last-mentioned was the first read. She spoke of the shock of the discovery of Mr. Dunster's body, found in the cutting of the new line of railroad from Hamley to the nearest railway station; the body so hastily buried long ago, in its clothes, by which it was now recognised—a recognition confirmed by one or two more personal and indestructible things, such as his watch and seal with his initials; of the shock to every one, the Osbaldistones in particular; of the further discovery of a fleam or horse-lancet, having the name of Abraham Dixon engraved on the handle; how Dixon had gone on Mr. Osbaldistone's business to a horse-fair in Ireland some weeks before this, and had had his leg broken by a kick from an unruly mare, so that he was barely able to

move about when the officers of justice went to apprehend him in Tralee.

At this point Ellinor cried out loud and shrill.

"Oh, Dixon! Dixon! and I was away enjoying myself."

They heard her cry, and came to the door, but it was bolted inside.

"Please go away," she said; "please go! I will be very quiet! only, please go!"

She could not bear just then to read any more of Miss Monro's letter; she tore open Mr. Johnson's—the date was a fortnight earlier than Miss Monro's; he also expressed his wonder at not hearing from her, in reply to his letter of January 9; but he added, that he thought that her trustees had judged rightly; the handsome sum the railway company had offered for the land when their surveyor decided on the alteration of the line; Mr. Osbaldistone, &c. &c. She could not read any more; it was Fate pursuing her. Then she took the letter up again and tried to read; but all that reached her understanding was the fact that Mr. Johnson had sent his present letter to Miss Monro, thinking that she might know of some private opportunity safer than the post. Mr. Brown's was just such a letter as he occasionally sent her from time to time; a correspondence that arose out of their mutual regard for their dead friend Mr. Ness. It, too, had been sent to Miss Monro to direct. Ellinor was on the point of putting it aside entirely, when the name of Corbet caught her eye: "You will be interested to hear that the old pupil of our departed friend, who was so anxious to obtain the folio Virgil with the Italian notes, is appointed the new judge in room of Mr. Justice Jenkin. At least, I conclude that Mr. Ralph Corbet, Q.C., is the same as the Virgil fancier."

"Yes," said Ellinor bitterly; "he judged well; it would never have done." They were the first words of anything like reproach which she ever formed in her own mind during all these years. She thought for a few moments of the old

times; it seemed to steady her brain to think of them. Then she took up and finished Miss Monro's letter. That excellent friend had done all which she thought Ellinor would have wished without delay. She had written to Mr. Johnson, and charged him to do everything he could to defend Dixon, and to spare no expense. She was thinking of going to the prison in the county-town, to see the old man herself; but Ellinor could perceive that all these endeavours and purposes of Miss Monro's were based on love for her own pupil, and a desire to set her mind at ease as far as she could, rather than on any idea that Dixon himself could be innocent. Ellinor put down the letters, and went to the door, then turned back, and locked them up in her writing-case with trembling hands; and after that she entered the drawing-room, looking liker to a ghost than to a living woman.

"Can I speak to you for a minute alone?" Her still, tuneless voice made the words into a command. Canon Livingstone arose and followed her into the little dining-room. "Will you tell me all you know—all you have heard about my—you know what?"

"Miss Monro was my informant—at least at first—it was in the *Times* the day before I left. Miss Monro says it could only have been done in a moment of anger if the old servant is really guilty; that he was as steady and good a man as she ever knew, and she seems to have a strong feeling against Mr. Dunster, as always giving your father much unnecessary trouble; in fact, she hints that his disappearance at the time was supposed to be the cause of a considerable loss of property to Mr. Wilkins."

"No!" said Ellinor eagerly, feeling that some justice ought to be done to the dead man; and then she stopped short, fearful of saying anything that should betray her full knowledge. "I mean this," she went on; "Mr. Dunster was a very disagreeable man personally—and papa—we none of us liked him; but he was quite honest—please remember that!"

The canon bowed, and said a few acquiescing words. He waited for her to speak again.

"Miss Monro says she is going to see Dixon in"——

"Oh, Mr. Livingstone, I can't bear it!"

He let her alone, looking at her pitifully, as she twisted and wrung her hands together, in her endeavour to regain the quiet manner she had striven to maintain through the interview. She looked up at him with a poor attempt at an apologetic smile—

"It is so terrible to think of that good old man in prison!"

"You do not believe him guilty!" said Canon Livingstone, in some surprise. "I am afraid, from all I heard and read, there is but little doubt that he did kill the man; I trust in some moment of irritation, with no premeditated malice."

Ellinor shook her head.

"How soon can I get to England?" asked she. "I must start at once."

"Mrs. Forbes sent out while you were lying down. I am afraid there is no boat to Marseilles till Thursday, the day after to-morrow."

"But I must go sooner!" said Ellinor, starting up. "I must go; please help me. He may be tried before I can get there!"

"Alas! I fear that will be the case, whatever haste you make. The trial was to come on at the Hellingford Assizes, and that town stands first on the Midland Circuit list. To-day is the 27th of February; the assizes begin on the 7th of March."

"I will start to-morrow morning early for Civita; there may be a boat there they do not know of here. At any rate, I shall be on my way. If he dies, I must die too. Oh! I don't know what I am saying, I am so utterly crushed down! It would be such a kindness if you would go away, and let no one come to me. I know Mrs. Forbes is so good, she will forgive me. I will say good-bye to you all, before I go to-morrow morning; but I must think now."

For one moment he stood looking at her, as if he longed to comfort her by more words. He thought better of it, however, and silently left the room.

For a long time Ellinor sat still; now and then taking up Miss Monro's letter, and re-reading the few terrible details. Then she bethought her that possibly the canon might have brought a copy of the *Times*, containing the examination of Dixon before the magistrates, and she opened the door and called to a passing servant to make the inquiry. She was quite right in her conjecture; Dr. Livingstone had had the paper in his pocket during his interview with her; but he thought the evidence so conclusive, that the perusal of it would only be adding to her extreme distress by accelerating the conviction of Dixon's guilt, which he believed she must arrive at sooner or later.

He had been reading the report over with Mrs. Forbes and her daughters, after his return from Ellinor's room, and they were all participating in his opinion upon it, when her request for the *Times* was brought. They had reluctantly agreed, saying there did not appear to be a shadow of doubt as to the fact of Dixon's having killed Mr. Dunster, only hoping there might prove to be some extenuating circumstances, which Ellinor had probably recollected, and which she was desirous of producing on the approaching trial.

CHAPTER XIII

Ellinor, having read the report of Dixon's examination in the newspaper, bathed her eyes and forehead in cold water, and tried to still her poor heart's beating, that she might be clear and collected enough to weigh the evidence.

Every line of it was condemnatory. One or two witnesses spoke of Dixon's unconcealed dislike of Dunster, a dislike which Ellinor knew had been entertained by the old servant

out of a species of loyalty to his master, as well as from personal distaste. The fleam was proved beyond all doubt to be Dixon's; and a man, who had been stable-boy in Mr. Wilkins's service, swore that on the day when Mr. Dunster was missed, and when the whole town was wondering what had become of him, a certain colt of Mr. Wilkins's had needed bleeding, and that he had been sent by Dixon to the farrier's for a horse-lancet, an errand which he had remarked upon at the time, as he knew that Dixon had a fleam of his own.

Mr. Osbaldistone was examined. He kept interrupting himself perpetually, to express his surprise at the fact of so steady and well-conducted a man as Dixon being guilty of so heinous a crime, and was willing enough to testify to the excellent character which he had borne during all the many years he had been in his (Mr. Osbaldistone's) service; but he appeared to be quite convinced by the evidence previously given of the prisoner's guilt in the matter, and strengthened the case against him materially by stating the circumstance of the old man's dogged unwillingness to have the slightest interference by cultivation with that particular piece of ground.

Here Ellinor shuddered. Before her, in that Roman bed-chamber, rose the fatal oblong she knew by heart—a little green moss or lichen, and thinly-growing blades of grass scarcely covering the caked and undisturbed soil under the old tree. Oh, that she had been in England when the surveyors of the railway between Ashcombe and Hamley had altered their line! She would have entreated, implored, compelled her trustees not to have sold that piece of ground for any sum of money whatever. She would have bribed the surveyors, done she knew not what—but now it was too late; she would not let her mind wander off to what might have been; she would force herself again to attend to the newspaper columns. There was little more: the prisoner had been asked if he could say anything to clear himself, and properly cautioned not to say anything to incriminate

himself. The poor old man's person was described, and his evident emotion. "The prisoner was observed to clutch at the rail before him to steady himself, and his colour changed so much at this part of the evidence that one of the turnkeys offered him a glass of water, which he declined. He is a man of a strongly-built frame, and with rather a morose and sullen cast of countenance."

"My poor, poor Dixon!" said Ellinor, laying down the paper for an instant; and she was near crying, only she had resolved to shed no tears till she had finished all, and could judge of the chances. There were but a few lines more: "At one time the prisoner seemed to be desirous of alleging something in his defence, but he changed his mind, if such had been the case, and in reply to Mr. Gordon (the magistrate) he only said, 'You've made a pretty strong case out again' me, gentlemen, and it seems for to satisfy you; so I think I'll not disturb your minds by saying anything more.' Accordingly, Dixon now stands committed for trial for murder at the next Hellingford Assizes, which commence on March the seventh, before Baron Rushton and Mr. Justice Corbet."

"Mr. Justice Corbet!" The words ran through Ellinor as though she had been stabbed with a knife, and by an irrepressible movement she stood up rigid. The young man, her lover in her youth, the old servant who in those days was perpetually about her—the two who had so often met in familiar if not friendly relations, now to face each other as judge and accused! She could not tell how much Mr. Corbet had conjectured from the partial revelation she had made to him of the impending shame that hung over her and hers. A day or two ago, she could have remembered the exact words she had used in that memorable interview; but now, strive as she would, she could only recall facts, not words. After all, the Mr. Justice Corbet might not be Ralph. There was one chance in a hundred against the identity of the two.

While she was weighing probabilities in her sick, dizzy

mind, she heard soft steps outside her bolted door, and low voices whispering. It was the bed-time of happy people with hearts at ease. Some of the footsteps passed lightly on; but there was a gentle rap at Ellinor's door. She pressed her two hot hands hard against her temples for an instant, before she went to open the door. There stood Mrs. Forbes in her handsome evening-dress, holding a lighted lamp in her hand.

"May I come in, my dear?" she asked. Ellinor's stiff dry lips refused to utter the words of assent which indeed did not come readily from her heart.

"I am so grieved at this sad news which the canon brings. I can well understand what a shock it must be to you; we have just been saying it must be as bad for you as it would be to us, if our old Donald should turn out to have been a hidden murderer all these years that he has lived with us; I really could as soon have suspected Donald as that white-haired respectable old man who used to come and see you at East Chester."

Ellinor felt that she must say something. "It is a terrible shock—poor old man! and no friend near him, even Mr. Osbaldistone giving evidence against him. Oh, dear, dear, why did I ever come to Rome?"

"Now, my dear, you must not let yourself take an exaggerated view of the case. Sad and shocking as it is to have been so deceived, it is what happens to many of us, though not to so terrible a degree; and as to your coming to Rome having anything to do with it"——

(Mrs. Forbes almost smiled at the idea, so anxious was she to banish the idea of self-reproach from Ellinor's sensitive mind; but Ellinor interrupted her abruptly)—

"Mrs. Forbes! did he—did Canon Livingstone tell you that I must leave to-morrow? I must go to England as fast as possible, to do what I can for Dixon."

"Yes, he told us you were thinking of it; and it was partly that made me force myself in upon you to-night. I think, my love, you are mistaken in feeling as if you were

called upon to do more than what the canon tells me Miss Monro has already done in your name—engaged the best legal advice, and spared no expense to give the suspected man every chance. What could you do more, even if you were on the spot? And it is very possible that the trial may have come on before you get home. Then what could you do? He would either have been acquitted or condemned; if the former, he would find public sympathy all in his favour; it always is for the unjustly accused. And if he turns out to be guilty, my dear Ellinor, it will be far better for you to have all the softening which distance can give to such a dreadful termination to the life of a poor man whom you have respected so long."

But Ellinor spoke again with a kind of irritated determination, very foreign to her usual soft docility—

"Please, just let me judge for myself this once! I am not ungrateful. God knows I don't want to vex one who has been so kind to me as you have been, dear Mrs. Forbes; but I must go—and every word you say to dissuade me only makes me more convinced. I am going to Civita to-morrow. I shall be that much on the way. I cannot rest here."

Mrs. Forbes looked at her in grave silence. Ellinor could not bear the consciousness of that fixed gaze. Yet its fixity only arose from Mrs. Forbes's perplexity as to how best to assist Ellinor, whether to restrain her by further advice—of which the first dose had proved so useless—or to speed her departure. Ellinor broke in on her meditations—

"You have always been so kind and good to me—go on being so—please, do! Leave me alone now, dear Mrs. Forbes, for I cannot bear talking about it, and help me to go to-morrow; and you do not know how I will pray to God to bless you!"

Such an appeal was irresistible. Mrs. Forbes kissed her very tenderly, and went to rejoin her daughters, who were clustered together in their mother's bed-room awaiting her coming.

"Well, mamma, how is she? What does she say?"

"She is in a very excited state, poor thing! and has got so strong an impression that it is her duty to go back to England and do all she can for this wretched old man, that I am afraid we must not oppose her. I am afraid that she really must go on Thursday."

Although Mrs. Forbes secured the services of a travelling-maid, Dr. Livingstone insisted on accompanying Ellinor to England; and it would have required more energy than she possessed at this time to combat a resolution which both words and manner expressed as determined. She would much rather have travelled alone with the maid; she did not feel the need of the services he offered; but she was utterly listless and broken down; all her interest was centred in the thought of Dixon and his approaching trial, and perplexity as to the mode in which she must do her duty.

They embarked late that evening in the tardy *Santa Lucia*, and Ellinor immediately went to her berth. She was not sea-sick; that might possibly have lessened her mental sufferings, which all night long tormented her. High-perched in an upper berth, she did not like disturbing the other occupants of the cabin till daylight appeared. Then she descended and dressed, and went on deck; the vessel was just passing the rocky coast of Elba, and the sky was flushed with rosy light, that made the shadows on the island of the most exquisite purple. The sea still heaved with yesterday's storm, but the motion only added to the beauty of the sparkles and white foam that dimpled and curled on the blue waters. The air was delicious, after the closeness of the cabin, and Ellinor only wondered that more people were not on deck to enjoy it. One or two stragglers came up, time after time, and began pacing the deck. Dr. Livingstone came up before very long; but he seemed to have made a rule of not obtruding himself on Ellinor, excepting when he could be of some use. After a few words of commonplace morning-greeting, he, too, began to walk backwards and forwards, while Ellinor sat quietly watching the lovely island

receding fast from her view—a beautiful vision never to be seen again by her mortal eyes.

Suddenly, there was a shock and sound all over the vessel; her progress was stopped; and a rocking vibration was felt everywhere. The quarter-deck was filled with blasts of steam, which obscured everything. Sick people came rushing up out of their berths in strange undress; the steerage passengers—a motley and picturesque set of people, in many varieties of gay costume—took refuge on the quarter-deck, speaking loudly in all varieties of French and Italian *patois*. Ellinor stood up in silent, wondering dismay. Was the *Santa Lucia* going down on the great deep, and Dixon unaided in his peril? Dr. Livingstone was by her side in a moment. She could scarcely see him for the vapour, nor hear him for the roar of the escaping steam.

"Do not be unnecessarily frightened," he repeated, a little louder. "Some accident has occurred to the engines. I will go and make instant inquiry, and come back to you as soon as I can. Trust to me!"

He came back to where she sat trembling.

"A part of the engine is broken, through the carelessness of these Neapolitan engineers; they say we must make for the nearest port—return to Civita, in fact."

"But Elba is not many miles away," said Ellinor. "If this steam were but away, you could see it still."

"And, if we were landed there, we might stay on the island for many days; no steamer touches there; but, if we return to Civita, we shall be in time for the Sunday boat."

"Oh, dear, dear!" said Ellinor. "To-day is the second —Sunday will be the fourth—the assizes begin on the seventh; how miserably unfortunate!"

"Yes!" he said, "it is. And these things always appear so doubly unfortunate, when they hinder our serving others! But it does not follow that, because the assizes begin at Hellingford on the seventh, Dixon's trial will come on so soon. We may still get to Marseilles on Monday evening; on by diligence to Lyons; it will—it must, I fear, be

Thursday, at the earliest, before we reach Paris—Thursday, the eighth—and I suppose you know of some exculpatory evidence that has to be hunted up?"

He added this unwillingly; for he saw that Ellinor was jealous of the secrecy she had hitherto maintained as to her reasons for believing Dixon innocent; but he could not help thinking that she, a gentle, timid woman, unaccustomed to action or business, would require some of the assistance which he would have been so thankful to give her; especially as this untoward accident would increase the press of time in which what was to be done would have to be done.

But no! Ellinor scarcely replied to his half-inquiry as to her reasons for hastening to England. She yielded to all his directions, agreed to his plans, but gave him none of her confidence, and he had to submit to this exclusion from sympathy in the exact causes of her anxiety.

Once more in the dreary *sala* at Civita, with the gaudy painted ceiling, the bare dirty floor, the innumerable rattling doors and windows! Ellinor was submissive and patient in demeanour, because so sick and despairing at heart. The maid was ten times as demonstrative of annoyance and disgust: she who had no particular reason for wanting to reach England, but who thought it became her dignity to make it seem as though she had.

At length the weary time was over; and again they sailed past Elba, and arrived at Marseilles. Now Ellinor began to feel how much assistance it was to her to have Dr. Livingstone for a "courier," as he had several times called himself.

CHAPTER XIV

"WHERE now?" said the canon, as they approached the London Bridge station.

"To the Great Western," said she; "Hellingford is on that line, I see. But, please, now we must part."

"Then I may not go with you to Hellingford? At any rate, you will allow me to go with you to the railway station, and do my last office as 'courier' in getting you your ticket and placing you in the carriage."

So they went together to the station, and learnt that no train was leaving for Hellingford for two hours. There was nothing for it but to go to the hotel close by, and pass away the time as best they could.

Ellinor called for the maid's accounts, and dismissed her. Some refreshment that the canon had ordered was eaten, and the table cleared. He began walking up and down the room, his arms folded, his eyes cast down. Every now and then, he looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. When that showed that it only wanted a quarter of an hour to the time appointed for the train to start, he came up to Ellinor, who sat leaning her head upon her hand, her hand resting on the table.

"Miss Wilkins," he began—and there was something peculiar in his tone which startled Ellinor—"I am sure you will not scruple to apply to me if in any possible way I can help you in this sad trouble of yours?"

"No, indeed I won't!" said Ellinor gratefully, and putting out her hand as a token. He took it, and held it; she went on, a little more hastily than before: "You know you were so good as to say you would go at once and see Miss Monro, and tell her all you know, and that I will write to her as soon as I can."

"May I not ask for one line?" he continued, still holding her hand.

"Certainly: so kind a friend as you shall hear all I can tell; that is, all I am at liberty to tell."

"'A friend'! Yes, I am a friend; and I will not urge any other claim just now. Perhaps"——

Ellinor could not affect to misunderstand him. His manner implied even more than his words.

"No!" she said eagerly. "We are friends. That is it. I think we shall always be friends, though I will tell you

now—something—this much—it is a sad secret. God help me! I am as guilty as poor Dixon, if, indeed, he is guilty—but he is innocent—indeed he is!"

"If he is no more guilty than you, I am sure he is! Let me be more than your friend, Ellinor—let me know all, and help you all that I can, with the right of an affianced husband!"

"No, no!" said she, frightened both at what she had revealed and by his eager, warm, imploring manner. "That can never be. You do not know the disgrace that may be hanging over me."

"If that is all," said he, "I take my risk—if that is all—if you only fear that I may shrink from sharing any peril you may be exposed to."

"It is not peril—it is shame and obloquy"——she murmured.

"Well! shame and obloquy. Perhaps, if I knew all, I could shield you from it."

"Don't, pray, speak any more about it now; if you do, I must say 'No.'"

She did not perceive the implied encouragement in these words; but he did, and they sufficed to make him patient.

The time was up, and he could only render her his last services as "courier"; and none other but the necessary words at starting passed between them.

But he went away from the station with a cheerful heart; while she, sitting alone and quiet, and at last approaching near to the place where so much was to be decided, felt sadder and sadder, heavier and heavier.

All the intelligence she had gained since she had seen the *Galignani* in Paris, had been from the waiter at the Great Western Hotel, who, after returning from a vain search for an unoccupied *Times*, had volunteered the information that there was an unusual demand for the paper because of Hellingford Assizes, and the trial there for murder that was going on.

There was no electric telegraph in those days; at every

station Ellinor put her head out, and inquired if the murder trial at Hellingford was ended. Some porters told her one thing, some another, in their hurry; she felt that she could not rely on them.

"Drive to Mr. Johnson's in the High Street—quick, quick! I will give you half-a-crown if you will go quick."

For, indeed, her endurance, her patience, was strained almost to snapping; yet at Hellingford station, where doubtless they could have told her the truth, she dared not ask the question. It was past eight o'clock at night. In many houses in the little country-town there were unusual lights and sounds. The inhabitants were showing their hospitality to such of the strangers brought by the assizes as were lingering there, now that the business which had drawn them was over. The judges had left the town that afternoon, to wind up the circuit by the short list of a neighbouring county-town.

Mr. Johnson was entertaining a dinner-party of attorneys, when he was summoned from dessert by the announcement of a "lady who wanted to speak to him immediate and particular."

He went into his study in not the best of tempers. There he found his client, Miss Wilkins, white and ghastly, standing by the fireplace, with her eyes fixed on the door.

"It is you, Miss Wilkins! I am very glad"——

"Dixon!" said she. It was all she could utter.

Mr. Johnson shook his head.

"Ah! that's a sad piece of business, and I'm afraid it has shortened your visit to Rome."

"Is he"——

"Ay, I'm afraid there's no doubt of his guilt. At any rate, the jury found him guilty, and"——

"And!" she repeated quickly, sitting down, the better to hear the words that she knew were coming—

"He is condemned to death."

"When?"

"The Saturday but one after the judges left the town, I suppose—it's the usual time."

"Who tried him?"

"Judge Corbet; and, for a new judge, I must say I never knew one who got through his business so well. It was really as much as I could stand, to hear him condemning the prisoner to death. Dixon was undoubtedly guilty, and he was as stubborn as could be—a sullen old fellow who would let no one help him through. I'm sure I did my best for him at Miss Monro's desire and for your sake. But he would furnish me with no particulars, help us to no evidence. I had the hardest work to keep him from confessing all before witnesses, who would have been bound to repeat it as evidence against him. Indeed, I never thought he would have pleaded 'Not Guilty.' I think it was only with a desire to justify himself in the eyes of some old Hamley acquaintances. Good God, Miss Wilkins! What's the matter? You're not fainting!" He rang the bell till the rope remained in his hands. "Here, Esther! Jerry! Whoever you are, come quick! Miss Wilkins has fainted! Water! Wine! Tell Mrs. Johnson to come here directly!"

Mrs. Johnson, a kind, motherly woman, who had been excluded from the "gentlemen's dinner-party," and had devoted her time to superintending the dinner her husband had ordered, came in answer to his call for assistance, and found Ellinor lying back in her chair white and senseless.

"Bessy, Miss Wilkins has fainted; she has had a long journey, and is in a fidget about Dixon, the old fellow who was sentenced to be hung for that murder, you know. I can't stop here, I must go back to those men. You bring her round, and see her to bed! The blue room is empty since Horner left. She must stop here, and I'll see her in the morning. Take care of her, and keep her mind as easy as you can, will you; for she can do no good by fidgeting."

And, knowing that he left Ellinor in good hands, and with plenty of assistance about her, he returned to his friends.

Ellinor came to herself before long.

"It was very foolish of me, but I could not help it," said she apologetically.

"No; to be sure not, dear. Here, drink this; it is some of Mr. Johnson's best port wine that he has sent out on purpose for you. Or would you rather have some white soup—or what? We've had everything you could think of for dinner, and you've only to ask and have. And then you must go to bed, my dear—Mr. Johnson says you must; and there's a well-aired room, for Mr. Horner only left us this morning."

"I must see Mr. Johnson again, please."

"But indeed you must not. You must not worry your poor head with business now; and Johnson would only talk to you on business. No; go to bed, and sleep soundly, and then you'll get up quite bright and strong, and fit to talk about business."

"I cannot sleep—I cannot rest till I have asked Mr. Johnson one or two more questions; indeed I cannot," pleaded Ellinor.

Mrs. Johnson knew that her husband's orders on such occasions were peremptory, and that she should come in for a good conjugal scolding, if, after what he had said, she ventured to send for him again. Yet Ellinor looked so entreating and wistful that she could hardly find in her heart to refuse her. A bright thought struck her.

"Here is pen and paper, my dear. Could you not write the questions you wanted to ask? and he'll just jot down the answers upon the same piece of paper. I'll send it in by Jerry. He has got friends to dinner with him, you see."

Ellinor yielded. She sat, resting her weary head on her hand, and wondering what were the questions which would have come so readily to her tongue, could she have been face to face with him. As it was, she only wrote this—

"How early can I see you to-morrow morning? Will you take all the necessary steps for my going to Dixon as soon as possible? Could I be admitted to him to-night?"

The pencilled answers were—

"Eight o'clock. Yes. No."

"I suppose he knows best," said Ellinor, sighing, as she read the last word. "But it seems wicked in me to be going to bed—and he so near, in prison."

When she rose up and stood, she felt the former dizziness return; and that reconciled her to seeking rest before she entered upon the duties which were becoming clearer before her, now that she knew all and was on the scene of action. Mrs. Johnson brought her white-wine whey instead of the tea she had asked for; and perhaps it was owing to this that she slept so soundly.

CHAPTER XV

When Ellinor awoke, the clear light of dawn was fully in the room. She could not remember where she was; for so many mornings she had wakened up in strange places, that it took her several minutes before she could make out the geographical whereabouts of the heavy blue moreen curtains, the print of the lord-lieutenant of the county on the wall, and all the handsome ponderous mahogany furniture that stuffed up the room. As soon as full memory came into her mind, she started up; nor did she go to bed again, although she saw by her watch on the dressing-table that it was not yet six o'clock. She dressed herself with the dainty completeness so habitual to her that it had become an unconscious habit, and then—the instinct was irrepressible—she put on her bonnet and shawl, and went down, past the servant on her knees cleaning the doorstep, out into the fresh open air; and so she found her way down the High Street to Hellingford Castle, the building in which the courts of assize were held—the prison in which Dixon lay condemned to die. She almost knew she could not see him;

yet it seemed like some amends to her conscience for having slept through so many hours of the night, if she made the attempt. She went up to the porter's lodge, and asked the little girl sweeping out the place if she might see Abraham Dixon. The child stared at her, and ran into the house, bringing out her father, a great, burly man, who had not yet donned either coat or waistcoat, and who, consequently, felt the morning air rather nipping. To him Ellinor repeated her question.

"Him as is to be hung come Saturday se'nnight? Why, ma'am, I've nought to do with it. You may go to the governor's house and try; but, if you'll excuse me, you'll have your walk for your pains. Them in the condemned cells is never seen by nobody without the sheriff's order. You may go up to the governor's house and welcome; but they'll only tell you the same. Yon's the governor's house."

Ellinor fully believed the man; and yet she went on to the house indicated, as if she still hoped that in her case there might be some exception to the rule, which she now remembered to have heard of before, in days when such a possible desire as to see a condemned prisoner was treated by her as a wish that some people might have, did have—people as far removed from her circle of circumstances as the inhabitants of the moon. Of course she met with the same reply, a little more abruptly given, as if every man was from his birth bound to know such an obvious regulation.

She went out past the porter, now fully clothed. He was sorry for her disappointment, but could not help saying, with a slight tone of exultation, "Well, you see I was right, ma'am!"

She walked as nearly round the castle as ever she could, looking up at the few high-barred windows she could see, and wondering in what part of the building Dixon was confined. Then she went into the adjoining church-yard, and, sitting down upon a tombstone, she gazed idly at the view spread below her—a view which was considered as the lion of the place, to be shown to all strangers by the

inhabitants of Hellingford. Ellinor did not see it, however; she only saw the blackness of that fatal night, the hurried work—the lanterns glancing to and fro. She only heard the hard breathing of those who were engaged upon unwonted labour; the few hoarse muttered words; the swaying of the branches to and fro. All at once, the church-clock above her struck eight, and then pealed out for distant labourers to cease their work for a time. Such was the old custom of the place. Ellinor rose up, and made her way back to Mr. Johnson's house in High Street. The room felt close and confined in which she awaited her interview with Mr. Johnson, who had sent down an apology for having overslept himself, and at last made his appearance in a hurried half-awakened state, in consequence of his late hospitality of the night before.

"I am so sorry I gave you all so much trouble last night," said Ellinor apologetically. "I was over-tired, and much shocked by the news I heard."

"No trouble, no trouble, I am sure. Neither Mrs. Johnson nor I felt it in the least a trouble. Many ladies, I know, feel such things very trying, though there are others that can stand a judge's putting on the black cap better than most men. I'm sure I saw some as composed as could be under Judge Corbet's speech."

"But about Dixon? He must not die, Mr. Johnson."

"Well, I don't know that he will," said Mr. Johnson, in something of the tone of voice he would have used in soothing a child. "Judge Corbet said something about the possibility of a pardon. The jury did not recommend him to mercy: you see, his looks went so much against him, and all the evidence was so strong, and no defence, so to speak, for he would not furnish any information on which we could base a defence. But the judge did give some hope, to my mind; though there are others that think differently."

"I tell you, Mr. Johnson, he must not die, and he shall not. To whom must I go?"

"Whew! Have you got additional evidence?" with a sudden sharp glance of professional inquiry.

"Never mind," Ellinor answered. "I beg your pardon . . . only tell me into whose hands the power of life and death has passed."

"Into the Home Secretary's—Sir Philip Homes's; but you cannot get access to him on such an errand. It is the judge who tried the case that must urge a reprieve—Judge Corbet."

"Judge Corbet?"

"Yes; and he was rather inclined to take a merciful view of the whole case. I saw it in his charge. He'll be the person for you to see. I suppose you don't like to give me your confidence, or else I could arrange and draw up what will have to be said?"

"No. What I have to say must be spoken to the arbiter—to no one else. I am afraid I answered you impatiently just now. You must forgive me; if you knew all, I am sure you would."

"Say no more, my dear lady! We will suppose you have some evidence not adduced at the trial. Well; you must go up and see the judge, since you don't choose to impart it to any one, and lay it before him. He will doubtless compare it with his notes of the trial, and see how far it agrees with them. Of course you must be prepared with some kind of proof; for Judge Corbet will have to test your evidence."

"It seems strange to think of him as the judge," said Ellinor, almost to herself.

"Why, yes. He's but a young judge. You knew him at Hamley, I suppose? I remember his reading there with Mr. Ness."

"Yes, but do not let us talk more about that time. Tell me, when can I see Dixon? I have been to the Castle already; but they said I must have a sheriff's order."

"To be sure. I desired Mrs. Johnson to tell you so last night. Old Ormerod was dining here; he is clerk to the magistrates, and I told him of your wish. He said he would see Sir Henry Croper, and have the order here before ten. But all this time Mrs. Johnson is waiting breakfast for us. Let me take you into the dining-room!"

It was very hard work for Ellinor to do her duty as a guest, and to allow herself to be interested and talked to on local affairs by her host and hostess. But she felt as if she had spoken shortly and abruptly to Mr. Johnson in their previous conversation, and that she must try and make amends for it; so she attended to all the details about the restoration of the church, and the difficulty of getting a good music-master for the three little Miss Johnsons, with all her usual gentle good-breeding and patience, though no one can tell how full her heart and imagination were of the coming interview with poor old Dixon.

By-and-by, Mr. Johnson was called out of the room, to see Mr. Ormerod and receive the order of admission from him. Ellinor clasped her hands tight together, as she listened with apparent composure to Mrs. Johnson's never-ending praise of the Hullah system. But, when Mr. Johnson returned, she could not help interrupting her eulogy, and saying—

"Then I may go now?"

Yes, the order was there—she might go, and Mr. Johnson would accompany her, to see that she met with no difficulty or obstacle.

As they walked thither, he told her that some one—a turnkey, or some one—would have to be present at the interview; that such was always the rule in the case of condemned prisoners; but that, if this third person was "obliging," he would keep out of earshot. Mr. Johnson quietly took care to see that the turnkey who accompanied Ellinor was "obliging."

The man took her across high-walled courts, along stone corridors, and through many locked doors, before they came to the condemned cells.

"I've had three at a time in here," said he, unlocking the final door, "after Judge Morton had been here. We always called him the 'Hanging Judge.' But it's five years since he died, and now there's never more than one in at a time; though once it was a woman for poisoning her husband. Mary Jones was her name."

The stone passage out of which the cells opened was light, and bare, and scrupulously clean. Over each door was a small barred window, and an outer window of the same description was placed high up in the cell, which the turnkey now opened.

Old Abraham Dixon was sitting on the side of his bed, doing nothing. His head was bent, his frame sunk, and he did not seem to care to turn round and see who it was that entered.

Ellinor tried to keep down her sobs, while the man went up to him and, laying his hand on his shoulder, and lightly shaking him, said—

"Here's a friend come to see you, Dixon." Then, turning to Ellinor, he added, "There's some as takes it in this kind o' stunned way, while others are as restless as a wild beast in a cage, after they're sentenced." And then he withdrew into the passage, leaving the door open, so that he could see all that passed, if he chose to look, but ostentatiously keeping his eyes averted, and whistling to himself, so that he could not hear what they said to each other.

Dixon looked up at Ellinor, but then let his eyes fall on the ground again; the increasing trembling of his shrunken frame was the only sign he gave that he had recognised her.

She sat down by him, and took his large, horny hand in hers. She wanted to overcome her inclination to sob hysterically before she spoke. She stroked the bony shrivelled fingers, on which her hot, scalding tears kept dropping.

"Dunnot do that," said he at length, in a hollow voice. "Dunnot take on about it; it's best as it is, missy."

"No, Dixon, it's not best. It shall not be. You know it shall not—cannot be."

"I'm rather tired of living. It's been a great strain and labour for me. I think I'd as lief be with God as with men. And, you see, I were fond on him ever sin' he were a little lad, and told me what hard times he had at school, he did,

just as if I were his brother! I loved him next to Molly Greaves. Dear! and I shall see her again, I reckon, come next Saturday week! They'll think well on me, up there, I'll be bound; though I cannot say as I've done all as I should do here below."

"But, Dixon," said Ellinor, "you know who did this—this"——

"Guilty o' murder," said he. "That's what they called it. Murder! And that it never were, choose who did it."

"My poor, poor father did it. I am going up to London this afternoon; I am going to see the judge, and tell him all."

"Don't you demean yourself to that fellow, missy! It's him as left you in the lurch as soon as sorrow and shame came nigh you."

He looked up at her now, for the first time; but she went on, as if she had not noticed those wistful, weary eyes.

"Yes! I shall go to him. I know who it is; and I am resolved. After all, he may be better than a stranger, for real help; and I shall never remember any—anything else, when I think of you, good faithful friend."

"He looks but a wizened old fellow in his grey wig. I should hardly ha' known him. I gave him a look, as much as to say, 'I could tell tales o' you, my lord judge, if I chose.' I don't know if he heeded me, though. I suppose it were for a sign of old acquaintance that he said he'd recommend me to mercy. But I'd sooner have death nor mercy, by long odds. Yon man out there says mercy means Botany Bay. It 'ud be like killing me by inches, that would. It would! I'd liefer go straight to heaven, than live on among the black folk."

He began to shake again: this idea of transportation, from its very mysteriousness, was more terrifying to him than death. He kept on saying plaintively, "Missy, you'll never let 'em send me to Botany Bay; I couldn't stand that."

"No, no!" said she. "You shall come out of this prison, and go home with me to East Chester; I promise you you

shall. I promise you. I don't yet quite know how, but trust in my promise. Don't fret about Botany Bay! If you go there, I go too. I am so sure you will not go. And you know, if you have done anything against the law in concealing that fatal night's work, I have done it too, and if you are to be punished, I will be punished too. But I feel sure it will be right; I mean as right as anything can be, with the recollection of that time present to us, as it must always be." She almost spoke these last words to herself. They sat on, hand in hand, for a few minutes more in silence.

"I thought you'd come to me. I know'd you were far away in foreign parts. But I used to pray to God. 'Dear Lord God!' I used to say, 'let me see her again!' I told the chaplain as I'd begin to pray for repentance, at after I'd done praying that I might see you once again; for it just seemed to take all my strength to say those words as I've named. And I thought as how God knew what was in my heart better than I could tell Him: how I was main and sorry for all as I've ever done wrong; I allays were, at after it was done; but I thought as no one could know how bitter-keen I wanted to see you."

Again they sank into silence. Ellinor felt as if she would fain be away and active in procuring his release; but she also perceived how precious her presence was to him; and she did not like to leave him a moment before the time allowed her. His voice had changed to a weak, piping old man's quaver, and between the times of his talking he seemed to relapse into a dreamy state; but through it all he held her hand tight, as though afraid that she would leave him.

So the hour elapsed, with no more spoken words than those above. From time to time, Ellinor's tears dropped down upon her lap; she could not restrain them, though she scarce knew why she cried just then.

At length, the turnkey said that the time allowed for the interview was ended. Ellinor spoke no word; but rose, and bent down, and kissed the old man's forehead, saying—

"I shall come back to-morrow. God keep and comfort you!"

So, almost without an articulate word from him in reply—he rose up, and stood on his shaking legs, as she bade him farewell, putting his hand to his head with the old habitual mark of respect—she went her way swiftly out of the prison, swiftly back with Mr. Johnson to his house, scarcely patient or strong enough in her hurry to explain to him fully all that she meant to do. She only asked him a few absolutely requisite questions; and informed him of her intention to go straight to London to see Judge Corbet.

Just before the railway carriage in which she was seated started on the journey, she bent forward, and put out her hand once more to Mr. Johnson. "To-morrow I will thank you for all," she said. "I cannot now."

It was about the same time that she had reached Hellingford on the previous night, that she arrived at the Great Western station on this evening—past eight o'clock. On the way she had remembered and arranged many things; one important question she had omitted to ask Mr. Johnson; but that was easily remedied. She had not inquired where she could find Judge Corbet; if she had, Mr. Johnson could probably have given her only his professional address. As it was, she asked for a Post-Office Directory at the hotel, and looked out for his private dwelling—128, Hyde Park Gardens.

She rang for a waiter.

"Can I send a messenger to Hyde Park Gardens?" she said, hurrying on to her business, tired and worn-out as she was. "It is only to ask if Judge Corbet is at home this evening. If he is, I must go and see him."

The waiter was a little surprised, and would gladly have had her name to authorise the inquiry; but she could not bear to send it; it would be bad enough that first meeting, without the feeling that he, too, had had time to recall all the past days. Better to go in upon him unprepared, and plunge into the subject.

The waiter returned with the answer, while she still was pacing up and down the room restlessly, nerving herself for the interview.

"The messenger has been to Hyde Park Gardens, ma'am. The Judge and Lady Corbet are gone out to dinner."

"Lady Corbet"! Of course, Ellinor knew that he was married. Had she not been present at the wedding in East Chester Cathedral? But, somehow, these recent events had so carried her back to old times, that the intimate association of the names, "the Judge and Lady Corbet," seemed to awaken her out of some dream.

"Oh, very well," she said, just as if these thoughts were not passing rapidly through her mind. "Let me be called at seven to-morrow morning, and let me have a cab at the door for Hyde Park Gardens at eight."

And so she went to bed; but scarcely to sleep. All night long she had the scenes of those old times, the happy, happy days of her youth, the one terrible night that cut all happiness short, present before her. She could almost have fancied that she heard the long-silent sounds of her father's step, her father's way of breathing, the rustle of his newspaper as he hastily turned it over, coming through the lapse of years and the silence of the night. She knew that she had the little writing-case of her girlhood with her, in her box. The treasures of the dead that it contained, the morsel of dainty sewing, the little sister's golden curl, the half-finished letter to Mr. Corbet, were all there. She took them out, and looked at each separately; looked at them long—long and wistfully. "Will it be of any use to me?" she questioned of herself, as she was about to put her father's letter back into its receptacle. She read the last words over again, once more: "From my death-bed I adjure you to stand her friend; I will beg pardon on my knees for anything."

"I will take it," thought she. "I need not bring it out; most likely there will be no need for it, after what I shall have to say. All is so altered, so changed between us, as utterly as if it never had been, that I think I shall have no

shame in showing it him, for my own part of it. While, if he sees poor papa's—dear, dear papa's—suffering humility, it may make him think more gently of one who loved him once; though they parted in wrath with each other, I'm afraid."

So she took the letter with her when she drove to Hyde Park Gardens.

Every nerve in her body was in such a high state of tension that she could have screamed out at the cabman's boisterous knock at the door. She got out hastily, before any one was ready or willing to answer such an untimely summons; paid the man double what he ought to have had; and stood there, sick, trembling, and humble.

CHAPTER XVI. AND LAST

"Is Judge Corbet at home? Can I see him?" she asked of the footman, who at length answered the door.

He looked at her curiously, and a little familiarly, before he replied—

"Why, yes! He's pretty sure to be at home at this time of day; but whether he'll see you is quite another thing."

"Would you be so good as to ask him? It is on very particular business."

"Can you give me a card? your name, perhaps, will do, if you have not a card. I say, Simmons" (to a lady's-maid crossing the hall), "is the judge up yet?"

"Oh yes! he's in his dressing-room this half-hour. My lady is coming down directly. It is just breakfast-time."

"Can't you put it off, and come again a little later?" said he, turning once more to Ellinor—white Ellinor! trembling Ellinor!

"No! please let me come in. I will wait. I am sure Judge Corbet will see me, if you will tell him I am here. Miss Wilkins. He will know the name."

"Well, then; will you wait here till I have got breakfast in?" said the man, letting her into the hall, and pointing to the bench there. He took her, from her dress, to be a lady's-maid or governess, or at most a tradesman's daughter; and, besides, he was behind-hand with all his preparations. She came in and sat down.

"You will tell him I am here," she said faintly.

"Oh yes, never fear; I'll send up word, though I don't believe he'll come to you before breakfast."

He told a page, who ran upstairs, and, knocking at the judge's door, said that a Miss Jenkins wanted to speak to him.

"Who?" asked the judge from the inside.

"Miss Jenkins. She said you would know the name, sir."

"Not I. Tell her to wait."

So Ellinor waited. Presently down the stairs, with slow deliberate dignity, came the handsome Lady Corbet, in her rustling silks and ample petticoats, carrying her fine boy, and followed by her majestic nurse. She was ill-pleased that any one should come and take up her husband's time when he was at home, and supposed to be enjoying domestic leisure; and her imperious, inconsiderate nature did not prompt her to any civility towards the gentle creature sitting down, weary and heart-sick, in her house. On the contrary, she looked her over as she slowly descended, till Ellinor shrank abashed from the steady gaze of the large black eyes. Then she, her baby and nurse, disappeared into the large dining-room, into which all the preparations for breakfast had been carried.

The next person to come down would be the judge. Ellinor instinctively put down her veil. She heard his quick, decided step; she had known it well of old.

He gave one of his sharp, shrewd glances at the person sitting in the hall and waiting to speak to him, and his practised eye recognised the lady at once, in spite of her travel-worn dress.

"Will you just come into this room?" said he, opening the door of his study, to the front of the house: the dining-room was to the back; they communicated by folding-doors.

The astute lawyer placed himself with his back to the window; it was the natural position of the master of the apartment; but it also gave him the advantage of seeing his companion's face in full light. Ellinor lifted her veil; it had only been a dislike to a recognition in the hall which had made her put it down.

Judge Corbet's countenance changed more than hers; she had been prepared for the interview; he was not. But he usually had the full command of the expression on his face.

"Ellinor! Miss Wilkins! is it you?" And he went forwards, holding out his hand with cordial greeting, under which the embarrassment, if he felt any, was carefully concealed. She could not speak all at once in the way she wished.

"That stupid Henry told me 'Jenkins'! I beg your pardon. How could they put you down to sit in the hall! You must come in and have some breakfast with us; Lady Corbet will be delighted, I'm sure." His sense of the awkwardness of the meeting with the woman who was once to have been his wife, and of the probable introduction which was to follow to the woman who was his actual wife, grew upon him, and made him speak a little hurriedly. Ellinor's next words were a wonderful relief; and her soft, gentle way of speaking was like the touch of a cooling balsam.

"Thank you, you must excuse me. I am come strictly on business; otherwise I should never have thought of calling on you at such an hour. It is about poor Dixon."

"Ah! I thought as much!" said the judge, handing her a chair, and sitting down himself. He tried to compose his mind to business; but in spite of his strength of character, and his present efforts, the remembrance of old times would come back at the sound of her voice. He wondered if he was as much changed in appearance as she struck him as

being in that first look of recognition; after that first glance he rather avoided meeting her eyes.

"I knew how much you would feel it. Some one at Hellingford told me you were abroad—in Rome, I think. But you must not distress yourself unnecessarily; the sentence is sure to be commuted to transportation, or something equivalent. I was talking to the Home Secretary about it only last night. Lapse of time and subsequent good character quite preclude any idea of capital punishment." All the time that he said this, he had other thoughts at the back of his mind—some curiosity, a little regret, a touch of remorse, a wonder how the meeting (which, of course, would have to be some time) between Lady Corbet and Ellinor would go off; but he spoke clearly enough on the subject in hand, and no outward sign of distraction from it appeared.

Ellinor answered—

"I came to tell you, what I suppose may be told to any judge, in confidence and full reliance on his secrecy, that Abraham Dixon was not the murderer." She stopped short, and choked a little.

The judge looked sharply at her.

"Then you know who was?" said he.

"Yes," she replied, with a low, steady voice, looking him full in the face, with sad, solemn eyes.

The truth flashed into his mind. He shaded his face, and did not speak for a minute or two. Then he said, not looking up, a little hoarsely, "This, then, was the shame you told me of, long ago?"

"Yes," said she.

Both sat quite still; quite silent for some time. Through the silence a sharp, clear voice was heard speaking through the folding-doors.

"Take the kedgeree down, and tell the cook to keep it hot for the judge. It is so tiresome people coming on business here, as if the judge had not his proper hours for being at chambers."

He got up hastily, and went into the dining-room; but he had audibly some difficulty in curbing his wife's irritation.

When he came back, Ellinor said—

"I am afraid I ought not to have come here now."

"Oh! it's all nonsense!" said he, in a tone of annoyance. "You've done quite right." He seated himself where he had been before; and again half-covered his face with his hand.

"And Dixon knew of this. I believe I must put the fact plainly to you—your father was the guilty person? He murdered Dunster?"

"Yes. If you call it murder. It was done by a blow, in the heat of passion. No one can ever tell how Dunster always irritated papa," said Ellinor, in a stupid, heavy way; and then she sighed.

"How do you know this?" There was a kind of tender reluctance in the judge's voice, as he put all these questions. Ellinor had made up her mind beforehand that something like them must be asked, and must also be answered; but she spoke like a sleep-walker.

"I came into papa's room just after he had struck Mr. Dunster the blow. He was lying insensible, as we thought —dead, as he really was."

"What was Dixon's part in it? He must have known a good deal about it. And the horse-lancet that was found with his name upon it?"

"Papa went to wake Dixon, and he brought his fleam—I suppose to try and bleed him. I have said enough, have I not? I seem so confused. But I will answer any question to make it clear that Dixon is innocent."

The judge had been noting all down. He sat still now without replying to her. Then he wrote rapidly, referring to his previous paper from time to time. In five minutes or so he read over the facts which Ellinor had stated, as he had now arranged them, in a legal and connected form. He just asked her one or two trivial questions as he did so. Then

he read it aloud to her, and asked her to sign it. She took up the pen, and held it, hesitating.

"This will never be made public?" said she.

"No; I shall take care that no one but the Home Secretary sees it."

"Thank you. I could not help it, now it has come to this."

"There are not many men like Dixon," said the judge, almost to himself, as he sealed the paper in an envelope.

"No," said Ellinor; "I never knew any one so faithful."

And just at the same moment the reflection on a less faithful person that these words might seem to imply struck both of them, and each instinctively glanced at the other.

"Ellinor!" said the judge, after a moment's pause, "we are friends, I hope?"

"Yes; friends," said she, quietly and sadly.

He felt a little chagrined at her answer. Why, he could hardly tell. To cover any sign of his feeling, he went on talking.

"Where are you living now?"

"At East Chester."

"But you come sometimes to town, don't you? Let us know always—whenever you come; and Lady Corbet shall call on you. Indeed, I wish you'd let me bring her to see you to-day?"

"Thank you. I am going straight back to Hellingford; at least, as soon as you can get me the pardon for Dixon."

He half-smiled at her ignorance.

"The pardon must be sent to the sheriff, who holds the warrant for his execution. But, of course, you may have every assurance that it shall be sent as soon as possible. It is just the same as if he had it now."

"Thank you very much," said Ellinor, rising.

"Pray don't go without breakfast! If you would rather not see Lady Corbet just now, it shall be sent in to you in this room, unless you have already breakfasted."

"No, thank you; I would rather not. You are very

kind, and I am very glad to have seen you once again. There is just one thing more," said she, colouring a little and hesitating. "This note to you was found under papa's pillow after his death; some of it refers to past things; but I should be glad if you could think as kindly as you can of poor papa—and so—if you will read it"——

He took it and read it, not without emotion. Then he laid it down on his table, and said—

"Poor man! he must have suffered a great deal for that night's work. And you, Ellinor, you have suffered, too."

Yes, she had suffered; and he who spoke had been one of the instruments of her suffering, although he seemed forgetful of it. She shook her head a little for reply. Then she looked up at him—they were both standing at the time—and said—

"I think I shall be happier now. I always knew it must be found out. Once more, good-bye, and thank you. I may take this letter, I suppose?" said she, casting envious loving eyes at her father's note, lying unregarded on the table.

"Oh! certainly, certainly," said he; and then he took her hand; he held it, while he looked into her face. He had thought it changed when he had first seen her; but it was now almost the same to him as of yore. The sweet, shy eyes, the indicated dimple in the cheek—and something of fever had brought a faint pink flush into her usually colourless cheeks. Married judge though he was, he was not sure if she had not more charms for him still in her sorrow and her shabbiness than the handsome stately wife in the next room, whose looks had not been of the pleasantest when he left her a few minutes before. He sighed a little regretfully, as Ellinor went away. He had obtained the position he had struggled for, and sacrificed for; but now he could not help wishing that the slaughtered creature laid on the shrine of his ambition were alive again.

The kedgeree was brought up again, smoking hot, but it remained untasted by him; and, though he appeared to be reading the *Times*, he did not see a word of the distinct type.

His wife, meanwhile, continued her complaints of the untimely visitor, whose name he did not give to her in its corrected form, as he was not anxious that she should have it in her power to identify the caller of this morning with a possible future acquaintance.

When Ellinor reached Mr. Johnson's house in Hellingford, that afternoon, she found Miss Monro was there, and that she had been with much difficulty restrained by Mr. Johnson from following her to London.

Miss Monro fondled and purred inarticulately through her tears over her recovered darling, before she could speak intelligibly enough to tell her that Canon Livingstone had come straight to see her immediately on his return to East Chester, and had suggested her journey to Hellingford, in order that she might be of all the comfort she could to Ellinor. She did not at first let out that he had accompanied her to Hellingford; she was a little afraid of Ellinor's displeasure at his being there; Ellinor had always objected so much to any advance towards intimacy with him that Miss Monro had wished to make. But Ellinor was different now.

"How white you are, Nelly!" said Miss Monro. "You have been travelling too much and too fast, my child."

"My head aches!" said Ellinor wearily. "But I must go to the Castle, and tell my poor Dixon that he is reprieved —I am so tired! Will you ask Mr. Johnson to get me leave to see him? He will know all about it."

She threw herself down on the bed in the spare-room; the bed with the heavy blue curtains. After an unheeded remonstrance, Miss Monro went to do her bidding. But it was now late afternoon, and Mr. Johnson said that it would be impossible for him to get permission from the sheriff that night.

"Besides," said he courteously, "one scarcely knows whether Miss Wilkins may not give the old man false hopes —whether she has not been excited to have false hopes herself; it might be a cruel kindness to let her see him, without more legal certainty as to what his sentence, or

reprieve, is to be. By to-morrow morning, if I have properly understood her story, which was a little confused"——

"She is so dreadfully tired, poor creature," put in Miss Monro, who never could bear the shadow of a suspicion that Ellinor was not wisest, best, in all relations and situations of life.

Mr. Johnson went on, with a deprecatory bow: "Well, then—besides, it really is the only course open to her—persuade her to rest for this evening. By to-morrow morning I will have obtained the sheriff's leave, and he will most likely have heard from London."

"Thank you! I believe that will be best."

"It is the only course," said he.

When Miss Monro returned to the bedroom, Ellinor was in a heavy, feverish slumber; so feverish and so uneasy did she appear, that, after the hesitation of a moment or two, Miss Monro had no scruple in wakening her.

But she did not appear to understand the answer to her request; she did not seem even to remember that she had made any request.

The journey to England, the misery, the surprises, had been too much for her. The morrow morning came, bringing the formal free pardon for Abraham Dixon. The sheriff's order for her admission to see the old man lay awaiting her wish to use it; but she knew nothing of all this.

For days, nay weeks, she hovered between life and death; tended, as of old, by Miss Monro, while good Mrs. Johnson was ever willing to assist.

One summer evening in early June, she awakened into memory.

Miss Monro heard the faint, piping voice, as she kept her watch by the bedside.

"Where is Dixon?" asked she.

"At the canon's house at Bromham." This was the name of Dr. Livingstone's country parish.

"Why?"

"We thought it better to get him into country air and fresh scenes at once."

"How is he?"

"Much better. Get strong, and he shall come to see you!"

"You are sure all is right?" said Ellinor.

"Sure, my dear. All is quite right."

Then Ellinor went to sleep again, out of very weakness and weariness.

From that time she recovered pretty steadily. Her great desire was to return to East Chester as soon as possible. The associations of grief, anxiety, and coming illness, connected with Hellingford, made her wish to be once again in the solemn, quiet, sunny close of East Chester.

Canon Livingstone came over to assist Miss Monro in managing the journey with her invalid. But he did not intrude himself upon Ellinor, any more than he had done in coming from Rome.

The morning after her return, Miss Monro said—

"Do you feel strong enough to see Dixon?"

"Yes. Is he here?"

"He is at the canon's house. He sent for him from Bromham, in order that he might be ready for you to see him when you wished."

"Please let him come directly," said Ellinor, flushing and trembling.

She went to the door to meet the tottering old man; she led him to the easy-chair that had been placed and arranged for herself; she knelt down before him, and put his hands on her head, he trembling and shaking all the while.

"Forgive me all the shame and misery, Dixon! Say you forgive me; and give me your blessing! And then let never a word of the terrible past be spoken between us!"

"It's not for me to forgive you, as never did harm to no one"——

"But say you do—it will ease my heart."

"I forgive thee!" said he. And then he raised himself to his feet with effort, and, standing up above her, he blessed her solemnly.

After that he sat down, she by him, gazing at him.

"Yon's a good man, missy," he said at length, lifting his slow eyes and looking at her. "Better nor t'other ever was."

"He is a good man," said Ellinor.

But no more was spoken on the subject. The next day, Canon Livingstone made his formal call. Ellinor would fain have kept Miss Monro in the room; but that worthy lady knew better than to stop.

They went on, forcing talk on different subjects. At last he could speak no longer on everything but that which he had most at heart. "Miss Wilkins!" (he had got up, and was standing by the mantelpiece, apparently examining the ornaments upon it)—"Miss Wilkins! is there any chance of your giving me a favourable answer now—you know what I mean—what we spoke about at the Great Western Hotel, that day?"

Ellinor hung her head.

"You know that I was once engaged before?"

"Yes! I know; to Mr. Corbet—he that is now the judge; you cannot suppose that would make any difference, if that is all. I have loved you, and you only, ever since we met, eighteen years ago. Miss Wilkins—Ellinor—put me out of suspense!"

"I will!" said she, putting out her thin white hand for him to take and kiss, almost with tears of gratitude; but she seemed frightened at his impetuosity and tried to check him. "Wait—you have not heard all—my poor, poor father, in a fit of anger, irritated beyond all bearing, struck the blow that killed Mr. Dunster—Dixon and I knew of it, just after the blow was struck—we helped to hide it—we kept the secret—my poor father died of sorrow and remorse—you now know all—can you still love me? It seems to me as if I had been an accomplice in such a terrible thing!"

"Poor, poor Ellinor!" said he, now taking her in his arms as a shelter. "How I wish I had known of all this years and years ago! I could have stood between you and so much."

A Dark Night's Work

Those who pass through the village of Bromham, and pause to look over the laurel-hedge that separates the rectory garden from the road, may often see, on summer days, an old, old man, sitting in a wicker-chair, out upon the lawn. He leans upon his stick, and seldom raises his bent head; but, for all that, his eyes are on a level with the two little fairy children who come to him in all their small joys and sorrows, and who learnt to lisp his name almost as soon as they did that of their father and mother.

Nor is Miss Monro often absent; and, although she prefers to retain the old house in the Close for winter quarters, she generally makes her way across to Canon Livingstone's residence every evening.

SO ENDS "A DARK NIGHT'S WORK"

THE SHAH'S ENGLISH GARDENER

The facts of the following narration were communicated to me by Mr. Burton, the head gardener at Teddesley Park, in Staffordshire. I had previously been told that he had been for a year or two in the service of the Shah of Persia; and this induced me to question him concerning the motives which took him so far from England, and the kind of life which he led at Teheran. I was so much interested in the details he gave me, that I made notes at the time, which have enabled me to draw up the following account:—

Mr. Burton is a fine-looking, healthy man, in the prime of life, whose appearance would announce his nation all the world over. He had completed his education as a gardener at Knight's, when, in 1848, an application was made to him, on behalf of the Shah of Persia, by Colonel Sheil, the English envoy at the court of Teheran; who proposed to Mr. Burton that he should return to Persia with the second Persian secretary to the embassy, Mirza Oosan Koola, and take charge of the Royal Gardens at Teheran, at a salary of a hundred pounds a year, with rooms provided for him, and an allowance of two shillings a day for the food of himself and the native servant whom he would find it necessary to employ. This prospect, and the desire, which is so natural to young men, to see countries beyond their own, led Mr. Burton to accept the proposal. The Mirza Oosan Koola and he left Southampton on the twenty-ninth of September, 1848, and went by steam to Constantinople. Thence they

journeyed without accident to the capital of Persia. The seat of government was removed to Teheran about seventy years ago, when the Kujur dynasty became possessed of the Persian throne. Their faction was predominant in the North of Persia, and they, consequently, felt more secure in Teheran than in the ancient southern capital. Teheran is situated in the midst of a wide plain, from two to three hundred miles long, which has a most dreary appearance, being totally uncultivated, and the soil of which is a light kind of reddish loam, that becomes pulverised after a long continuance of dry weather, and then rises as great clouds of sand, sometimes even obscuring the sun several hours in a day for several successive days.

Bad news awaited Mr. Burton on his arrival at Teheran. The Shah, who had commissioned Colonel Sheil to engage an English gardener, was dead. His successor cared little either about gardening or his predecessor's engagements. Colonel Sheil was in England. Mr. Burton's heart sank a little within him; but, having a stout English spirit, and great faith in the British embassy, he insisted on a partial fulfilment of the contract. Until this negotiation was completed, Mr. Burton was lodged in the house of Mirza Oosan Koola. Mr. Burton was, therefore, for a month, a member of a Persian household belonging to one of the upper middle classes.

The usual mode of living in one house seemed pretty nearly the same in all that fell under the range of Mr. Burton's observation. The Persians get up at sunrise, when they have a cup of coffee. The few hours in the day in which they condescend to labour in any way, are from sunrise until seven or eight o'clock in the morning. After that, the heat becomes so intense (frequently one hundred and eight or one hundred and nine degrees in the shade) that all keep within doors, lying about on mats in passages or rooms. At ten they have their first substantial meal; which consists of mutton and rice, stewed together in a rude saucepan over a charcoal fire, built out of doors. Sometimes,

in addition to this dish, they have a kind of soup, or "water-meat" (which is the literal translation of the Persian name), made of water, mutton, onions, parsley, fowls, rice, dried fruits, apricots, almonds, and walnuts, stewed together. But this, as we may guess from the multiplicity of the ingredients, is a dainty dish. At four o'clock, the panting Persians, nearly worn out by the heat of the day, take a cup of strongly perfumed tea, with a little bitter-orange juice squeezed into it; and after this tonic they recover strength enough to smoke and lounge. Dinner was the grand meal of the day, to which they invited friends. It was not unlike breakfast, but was preceded by a dessert, at which wine was occasionally introduced, but which always consisted of melons and dried fruits. The dinner was brought in on a pewter tray; but Mr. Burton remarked that the pewter dishes were very dingy. A piece of common print was spread on the ground, and cakes of bread put on it. They had no spoons for the soup, or "water-meat," but soaked their bread in it, or curled it round into a hollow shape, and fished up what they could out of the abyss. At the Mirza's they had spoons for the sour goat's-milk, with ice, which seemed to be one of their delicacies. The ice is brought down from the mountains, and sold pretty cheaply in the bazaars. Sugar and salt are eaten together with this iced sour goat's-milk. Smoking narghilahs beguiles the evening hours very pleasantly. They pluck a quantity of rose-blossoms and put them into the water through which the smoke passes; but the roses last in season only a month. Mirza Oosan Koola had a few chairs in the house for the use of the gentlemen of the Embassy.

At last the negotiation respecting Mr. Burton's engagement was ended. His friends at the Embassy had insisted that the present Shah should install him in the office of royal gardener at the salary proposed by his predecessor. Accordingly, about a month after his arrival at Teheran, he took possession of two rooms, appropriated to his use, in the garden of El Kanai. This garden consisted of six acres,

with a mud-wall all round. There were avenues of fruit-trees planted, with lucerne growing under them, which was cut for the food of the horses in the royal stable; but the lucerne and the trees gave this royal garden very much the aspect of an English orchard, and must have been a very disenchanting prospect for a well-trained gardener, accustomed to our flower-beds, and vegetable-gardens. The fruit trees were apricots, apples, pears, and cherries—the latter of the same description as ours, but finer in quality; the apricots were of a kind which Mr. Burton had never seen before, with large sweet kernels. He brought some of the stones with him to England, and gave them to his old master, Mr. Knight. If this square plot of orchard-ground, surrounded by a mud-wall, was the cheerless prospect outside, the two rooms which Mr. Burton was to inhabit were not much more attractive. Bare of all furniture, with floors of mud and chaff beaten together, they did not even contain the mats which play so many parts in Persian houses. Mr. Burton's first care was to purchase mats, and hire a servant to market and cook for him. The people at the Embassy sent him the various bales of seeds, roots, and implements, which he had brought with him from England; and he hoped before long to introduce some improvements into Persian gardening; so little did he as yet know the nature of the people with whom he had to deal. But before he was well settled in his two rooms, while he was yet unpacking his English bales, some native plasterers told him that, outside of his wooden door (which fastened only with a slight chain), six men lay in wait for him to do him evil, partly prompted by the fact of his being a foreigner, partly in hopes of obtaining possession of some of the contents of these bales.

It was two miles to the Embassy, and Mr. Burton was without a friend nearer; his very informants would not stand by him, but would rather rejoice in his discomfiture. But, being a brave, resolute man, he picked out a scythe from among his English implements, threw open the door, and began to address the six men (who, sure enough, lay

crouched near the entrance) in the best Persian he could muster. His Persian eloquence, or possibly the sight of the scythe wielded by a stout, resolute man, produced the desired effect: the six men, fortunately, went away, without having attacked him, for any effort at self-defence on his part would have strengthened the feeling of hostility already strong against him. Once more, he was left in quiet to unpack his goods, with such shaded light as two windows, covered over with paper and calico, could give. But when his tools were unpacked—tools selected with such care and such a hoping heart in England—who were to use them? The men appointed as gardeners under him would not work, because they were never paid. If Mr. Burton made them work, he should pay them, they said. At length he did persuade them to labour, during the hours in which exertion was possible, even to a native. Mr. Burton began to inquire how these men were paid, or if their story was true, that they never were. It was true that wages for labour done for the Shah were most irregularly given. And, when the money could no longer be refused, it was paid in the form of bills upon some gate to a town, or some public bath, a hundred or a hundred and twenty miles away, such gates and baths being royal property. Honest payment of wages being rare, of course stealing is plentiful; and it is even winked at by the royal officers. The gardeners under Mr. Burton, for instance, would gather the flowers he had cherished with care, and present them to any chief who came into the Baugh-el-Kanai; and the present they received in turn constituted their only means of livelihood. Sometimes, Mr. Burton was the sole labourer in this garden, and he had the charge of Baugh-el-Colleza, twenty square acres in size, and at some distance from El Kanai, where he lived. When the hot weather came on, he fell ill of diarrhœa, and for three months lay weary and ill on his mat, unable to superintend, if there were gardeners, or to work himself, if there were none.

After he recovered, he seems to have been hopeless of doing any good in such a climate, and among such a people.

The Shah's English Gardener

The Shah took little interest in horticulture. He sometimes came into the gardens of El Kanai (in which his palace was situated), and would ask some questions, through an interpreter, in a languid, weary kind of way. Sometimes, when Mr. Burton had any vegetables ready, he requested leave to present them himself to the Shah; when this was accorded, he wove a basket out of the twigs of the white poplar (the tree which most abounded on the great barren plain surrounding Teheran); and, filling this with lettuces, or peas, or similar garden produce, he was ushered with much ceremony into one of the courts ("small yards," as Mr. Burton once irreverently called them) belonging to the palace. There, in a kind of balcony projecting from one of the windows, the Shah sat; and the English gardener, without shoes, but with the lamb's-skin *fez* covering his head, bowed low three times, as he gave up his basket to be handed to the Shah. Mr. Burton did not perform the Persian salaam, considering such a slave-like obeisance unbefitting a European. The Shah received these baskets of vegetables, some of which were new to him, with great indifference, not caring to ask any questions. The spirit of curiosity, however, was alive in the harem, if nowhere else; and, one day, Mr. Burton was surprised to receive a command to go and sow some annuals in one of the courts of the harem, for such was the Queen-mother's desire. So, taking a few packets of common flower-seeds, he went through some rooms in the palace, before he arrived at the courts, which open one out of another. These rooms Mr. Burton considered as little better, whether in size, construction, or furniture, than his own garden-dwelling; but there are some apartments in this royal palace which are said to be splendid—one lined with plate-glass, and several fitted up with the beautiful painted windows for which Persia is celebrated. On entering the courts belonging to the harem, Mr. Burton found himself attended by three or four soldiers and two eunuchs—all with drawn swords, which they made a little parade of holding above him, rather to his amusement, especially as he seems

to have had occasional glimpses of peeping ladies, who ought rather to have had the swords held over them. Before passing from one yard to another, one or two soldiers would precede him, to see that the coast was clear. And if a veiled lady chanced, through that ignorance which is bliss all the world over, to come into the very yard where he was, the soldiers seized him, huddled him into a dark corner, and turned his face to the wall; she, meanwhile, passing through under the cover of her servant's large cloak, something like a chicken peeping from under the wing of the hen. Whatever might have been their danger from the handsome young Englishman, he, at least, was not particularly attracted by their appearance. The utmost praise he could bestow was, that "one or two were tolerably good-looking;" and, on being pressed for details, he said that those ladies of the harem of whom he caught a glimpse resembled all other Persian women, in having very large features, very coarse complexions, and large eyes. They (as well as the men) paint the eyebrows, so as to make them appear to meet. They are stoutly-built. Such were the observations which Mr. Burton made, as he was passing through the yards, or courts, which led into the small garden where he was to sow his flower-seeds. Here the Queen-mother sat in a projecting balcony; but, as soon as she saw the stranger, she drew back. She is about thirty-five years of age, and possesses much influence in the country; which, as she is a cruel and ambitious woman, has produced great evils.

One day, Mrs. Sheil's maid, who had accompanied her mistress on a visit to the ladies in the harem, fell in with a Frenchwoman who had been an inhabitant there for more than twenty years. She seemed perfectly contented with her situation, and had no wish to exchange it for any other.

Every now and then Mr. Burton sent flowers to the harem: such as he could cultivate in the dry, hot garden, with no command of labour. Marvel of Peru, African marigolds, single stocks, and violets planted along the sides of the walks between planes and poplars, were the flowers

he gathered to form his nosesays. But all gardening was weary and dreary work; partly owing to the great heat of the climate, partly to the scarcity of water, but most especially because there was no service or assistance to be derived from any other man. The men appointed to assist him grew more careless and lazy than ever as time rolled on; he had no means of enforcing obedience, or attention, and, if he had had, he would not have dared to use it, and so to increase the odium that attached to him as a foreigner. Moreover, no one cared whether the gardens flourished or decayed. If it had not been for the kindness of some of the English residents, among whom he especially mentioned Mr. Reade, his situation would have been utterly intolerable.

There was nothing in the external life of the place which could compensate for his individual disappointment; at least, he perceived nothing. One day, in crossing the market-place, he saw eight men lying with their heads cut off; executed for being religious fanatics, who had assumed the character of prophets. At another time, there were six men put to death for highway robbery; and the mode of death was full of horror, whatever their crimes might be. They were hung head downwards, with the right arm and leg cut off; one of them dragged out life in this state for three days. Even the minor punishments are cruel and vindictive, as they always are where the power and execution of the laws is uncertain. One of the penalties inflicted for slight offences, is to have a string passed through the nostrils, and to be led for three successive days through the bazaars and market-places by a crier, proclaiming the nature of the misdemeanour committed. Blindness is very common: Mr. Burton has often seen six or eight blind men walking in a string, each with his right arm on the shoulder of his precursor. It is partly caused by ophthalmia, produced by the dust, and partly due to the Shah having it in his power to inflict the punishment of pulling out both, or one of, the eyes. The great-grandfather of the present Shah, Aga Mohammed, the founder of the Kujur dynasty, had

large baskets-full of the eyes of his enemies presented to him after his accession to the throne.

Let us change the subject to attar of roses; though all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten the memory of that last sentence. Attar of roses is made and sold in the bazaars; the rose employed is the common single pink one, which must be gathered before the sudden rise of the hot sun causes the dew to evaporate. By the side of the attar-sellers may be seen the Jew, selling trinkets; the Armenians —Christians in name, and, as such, bound by no laws of Mohammed—selling a sweetish red wine and arrakee, a spirit made from the refuse of grapes and resembling gin; while through the bazaars men go, having leathern bags on their backs containing bad, dirty water, and a lump of ice in a basin, into which they pour out draughts for their customers. Ice is brought down from the mountains, and sold at the rate of a large lump for two or three *pools*—a *pool* being a small copper coin, of which thirty make one *koraun* (silver), value eleven-pence; and ten *korauns* make one *tomaun*, a gold coin of the value of nine shillings. The drinking-water is procured from open drains, or from tanks, in which all the washing the Persians ever give their clothes is done. They use no soap even for shaving; but soapy water would be preferable to the beverage obtained from these sources, with vermin floating on its surface. No wonder that the cholera returns every three years, and is a fatal scourge; especially when we learn that the doctors and barbers in Teheran, as formerly in England, unite the two professions and that the great resource in all cases of illness is the lancet.

Besides the shops in the bazaars, where provisions and beverages of various kinds are sold, there are others for silks, carpets, embroidered pieces, something like the Indian shawls, but smaller in size, and purchased by the Europeans for waist-coats; and Cashmere shawls, which even there, and though not always new, bear the high prices of from fifty pounds to one hundred pounds. Those which were presented to the

ladies of the Embassy were worth, at Teheran, one hundred pounds apiece. There are also lamb's-skin caps, or *fezzes*, about half a yard high, conical in shape, and open, or crownless, at the top; heavier than a hat, but much cooler, owing to the ventilation produced by this opening. No Europeans wear hats, except one or two at the Embassy. Cotton materials are used for dresses by the common people, manufactured at Teheran. There are very few articles of British manufacture sold in the bazaars; but French, German, and Russian things abound. A fondness for watches seems to be a Persian weakness; some of the higher classes will wear two at a time, like the English dandies sixty years ago; and sometimes both these watches will be in a state of standstill. It is therefore no wonder that a little German watchmaker, who is settled at Teheran, is making his fortune. The mode of reckoning time is from sunrise to sunset—prayers being said by the faithful before each of these. The day and night are each divided into "watches" of three hours long; subdividing the time between sunrise and mid-day, mid-day and sunset.

Mr. Burton saw little of the religious ceremonies of the Persians. He had never been inside a mosque; but had seen people saying their prayers at the appointed times (at the expiration of every watch through the day, he believed), on raised platforms, erected for the purpose, up and down the town. The form of washing the hands before they say their prayers is gone through by country-people on the dusty plain, using soil instead of water—the more purifying article of the two, one would suppose, after hearing Mr. Burton's account of the state of the drains and tanks in Teheran. The priests are recognised by the white turbans which they wear as a class distinction; and our English gardener does not seem to have come in contact with any of them, excepting in occasional *rencontres* in the streets; where the women, veiled and shrouded, shuffle along—their veils being transparent just at the eyes, so as to enable them to see without being seen; while their clumsy, shapeless

mantles effectually prevent all recognition, even from husband or father. The higher class (the wives of *Mirzas*, or noblemen) are conveyed in a kind of covered hand-barrow from place to place. This species of rude carriage will hold two ladies sitting upright, and has a small door on either side; it is propelled by one before and one behind.

As long as these national peculiarities were novel enough to excite curiosity, Mr. Burton had something to relieve the monotony of his life, which was very hopeless in the horticultural line. By-and-by it sank into great sameness. The domestic changes were of much the same kind as the Vicar of Wakefield's migration from the blue bed to the brown: for three or four months in the hot season, Mr. Burton conveyed his mat up the mud-staircase, which led from his apartments through a trap-door on to the flat roof, and slept there. When the hot weather was over, Mr. Burton came down under cover. He felt himself becoming utterly weary and enervated; and probably wondered less than he had done on his first arrival at the lazy way in which the natives worked; sitting down, for instance, to build a wall. Indifference, which their religion may dignify in some things into fatalism, seemed to prevail everywhere and in every person. They ate their peas and beans unshelled, rather than take any unnecessary trouble; a piece of piggism which especially scandalised him.

Twice in the year there were great religious festivals, which roused the whole people into animation and enthusiasm. One in the spring was the *Noorooz*, when a kind of miracle-play was acted simultaneously upon the various platforms in the city; the grandest representation of all being in the market-place, where thirty or forty thousand attended. The subject of this play is the death of the sons of Ali; the Persians being *Sheeah*, or followers of Ali, and, as such, regarded as schismatics by the more orthodox Turks, who do not believe in the three successors of Mohammed. This "mystery" is admirably performed, and excites the Persians to passionate weeping. A Frank ambassador is invariably

introduced, who comes to intercede for the sons of Ali. This is the tradition of the Persians; and, although not corroborated by any European legend, it is so faithfully believed in by the Persians, that it has long procured for the Europeans a degree of kindly deference, very different from the feeling with which they are regarded by the Ali-hating Turks. The other religious festival occurs some time in August, and is of much the same description; some event (Mr. Burton believed it was the death of Mohammed) being dramatised, and acted in all the open public places. The weeping and wailing are as general at this representation as at the other. Mr. Burton himself said, "he was so cut up by it, he could not help crying;" and excused himself for what he evidently considered a weakness, by saying that everybody there was doing the same.

Sometimes the Shah rode abroad; he and his immediate attendants were well mounted; but behind, around, came a rabble rout to the number of one, two, or even three thousand, on broken-down horses, on mules, on beggarly donkeys, or running on foot, their rags waving in the wind, everybody, anybody, anyhow. The soldiers in attendance did not contribute to the regularity or uniformity of the scene, as there is no regulation height, and the dwarf of four feet ten jostles his brother in arms who towers above him at the stature of six feet six.

In strange contrast with this wild tumult and disorderly crowd must be one of the Shah's amusements, which consists in listening to Mr. Burgess (the appointed English interpreter), who translates the *Times*, *Illustrated News*, and, occasionally, English books, for the pleasure of the Shah. One wonders what ideas certain words convey, representative of the order and uniform regularity of England.

In October, 1849, Colonel Shiel returned to Teheran, after his sojourn in England; and soon afterwards it was arranged that Mr. Burton should leave Persia, and shorten his time of engagement to the Shah by one-half. Accordingly, as soon as he had completed a year in Teheran, he

began to make preparations for returning to Europe; and about March, 1850, he arrived at Constantinople, where he remained another twelvemonth. The remembrance of Mr. Burton's Oriental life must be in strange contrast to the regular, well-ordered comfort of his present existence.

FRENCH LIFE

I.

Paris, February, 1862.

We went to-day along the Boulevard Sévastopol, Rive Gauche, to pay a call. I knew the district well about six years ago, when it was a network of narrow tortuous streets; the houses high, irregular, picturesque, historical, dirty, and unhealthy. I used to have much difficulty in winding my way to certain points in the Quartier Latin from the Faubourg St. Germain, where I was staying. Now, the Hôtel Cluny is enclosed in a neat garden, the railings of which run alongside of the Boulevard Sévastopol; a little further, on the same side to the left, the Sorbonne Church is well exposed to view; and the broad artery of the new Boulevard runs up to the Luxembourg gardens, making a clear passage for air and light through the densely populated *quartier*. It is a great gain in all material points; a great loss to memory and to that kind of imagination which loves to repeople places. The street in which our friend lived was old and narrow; the *trottoir* was barely wide enough for one uncrinolined person to walk on; and it was impossible to help being splashed by the passing carriages, which indeed threw dirt upon the walls of the houses till there was a sort of dado of mud all along the street. In the grander streets of former days this narrowness did not signify; the houses were of the kind called *entre cour et jardin* (of which there are specimens in Piccadilly), with the porter's lodge, the offices, and stables abutting on the street; the grand court intervening between the noise and bustle and the high dwelling-house of the

family, which out-topped the low buildings in front. But in the humbler street to which we were bound there were few houses *entre cour et jardin*; and I could not help wondering how people bore to live in the perpetual noise, and heavy closeness of atmosphere.

The friend we were going to see, Madame A——, had lived in this street for many years. Her rooms were lofty and tolerably large. The gloomy outlook of the long narrow windows was concealed by the closed muslin curtains, which were of an irreproachable whiteness. I knew the rooms of old. We had to pass through the *salle-à-manger* to the salon; and from thence we, being intimate friends, went on into her bedroom. The *salle-à-manger* had an inlaid floor, very slippery, and without a carpet; the requisite chairs and tables were the only furniture. The pile of clean dinner-plates was placed on the top of a china stove; a fire would be lighted in it, half-an-hour before dinner, which would warm the plates as well as the room. The salon was graced with the handsome furniture of thirty or forty years ago; but it was a room to be looked at rather than used. Indeed, the family only sit in it on Sunday evenings, when they receive. The floor was *parqueté* in this room, but here and there it was covered with small brilliantly-coloured Persian carpets: before the sofa, underneath the central table, and before the fire. There were the regular pieces of furniture which were *de rigueur* in a French household of respectability when Madame A—— was married: the gilt vases of artificial flowers, each under a glass shade; the clock, with a figure of a naked hero, supposed to represent Achilles, leaning on his shield (the face of the clock); and the "*guéridon*" (round, marble-topped table), which was so long the one indispensable article in a French drawing-room.

But, altogether, Madame A——'s *salon* does not look very habitable; and we pass on into the bed-room, which has little enough of daylight coming through the high narrow windows, but is bright and home-like from the brilliant blaze and flicker of the wood-fire on the hearth. In the far corner is

the bed: a grand four-post, with looped-up draperies of some warm colour, which I dare say would prove to be faded if one were to see them close, in full country daylight; but which look like a pictorial background to the rest of the room. On each side of the fire is a great arm-chair; in front is a really comfortable sofa: not elegant, nor hard, nor gilded like the sofas in the drawing-room, but broad, low, clean, fit to serve, as I dare say it has done before now, for a bed on occasion. Parallel to this, but further from the fire, is a table with Madame's work-box; her two pots of flowers, looking as fresh as if the plants were growing in a country garden; the miniatures of her children, set up on little wooden easels; and her books of devotion.

But Madame reads more than books of devotion. She is up in the best modern literature of more than one country. To-day, we were exceedingly struck with her great powers of narration. She seizes the points of a story and reproduces them in the most effective simple language. She is certainly aided in this by her noble, expressive face, still bearing traces of remarkable beauty in the severe and classical style. Her gesticulation, too, is unlike what we commonly call French; there is no rapid action of the graceful hands and arms, but a gentle and slow movement from time to time, as if they sympathized with the varying expression of her face. She sat by her fire-side, dressed in black, her constant colour; which she wears as appropriate to her age rather than to her condition, for she is not a widow. Every now and then, she addressed a few tender words to an invalid of the family; showing that with all her lively interest in the histories she was telling us, her eye and ear were watchful for the slightest signs of discomfort in another. . . .

Our conversation drifted along to the old French custom of receiving in bed. It was so highly correct, that the newly-made wife of the Duc de St. Simon went to bed, after the early dinner of those days, in order to receive her wedding-visits. The Duchesse de Maine, of the same date, used to have a bed in the ball-room at Sceaux, and to lie (or

half-sit) there, watching the dancers. I asked if there was not some difference in dress between the day- and the night-occupation of the bed. But Madame A—— seemed to think there was very little. The custom was put an end to by the Revolution; but one or two great ladies preserved the habit until their death. Madame A—— had often seen Madame de Villette receiving in bed; she always wore white gloves, which Madame A—— imagined was the only difference between the toilette of day and night. Madame de Villette was the adopted daughter of Voltaire, and, as such, all the daring innovators upon the ancient modes of thought and behaviour came to see her, and pay her their respects. She was also the widow of the Marquis de Villette, and as such she received the homage of the ladies and gentlemen of the *ancien régime*.

Altogether her weekly receptions must have been very amusing, from Madame A——'s account. The old Marquise lay in bed; around her sat the company; and, as the climax of the visit, she would desire her *femme de chambre* to hand round the heart of Voltaire, which he had bequeathed to her, and which she preserved in a little golden case. Then she would begin and tell anecdotes about the great man; great to her, and with some justice. For he had been travelling in the South of France, and had stopped to pass the night in a friend's house, where he was very much struck by the deep sadness on the face of a girl of seventeen, one of his friend's daughters; and, on inquiring the cause, he found out that, in order to increase the portions of the others, this young woman was to be sent into a convent—a destination which she extremely disliked. Voltaire saved her from it by adopting her, and promising to give her a *dot* sufficient to insure her a respectable marriage. She had lived with him for some time at Ferney before she became Marquise de Villette. (You will remember the connexion existing between her husband's family and Madame de Maintenon, as well as with Bolingbroke's second wife.)

Madame de Villette must have been an exceedingly

inconséquente person, to judge from Madame A——'s very amusing description of her conversation. Her sentences generally began with an assertion which was disproved by what followed. Such as, "It was wonderful with what ease Voltaire uttered witty impromptus. He would shut himself up in his library all the morning, and in the evening he would gracefully lead the conversation to the point he desired, and then bring out the verse or the epigram he had composed for the occasion, in the most unpremeditated and easy manner!" Or, "He was the most modest of men. When a stranger arrived at Ferney, his first care was to take him round the village, and to show him all the improvements he had made, the good he had done, the church he had built. And he was never easy until he had given the new-comer the opportunity of hearing his most recent compositions." Then she would show an old grandfather's high-backed, leather, arm-chair, in which she said he wrote his *Henriade*, forgetting that he was at that time quite a young man.

Madame A—— said that Madame de Villette's receptions were worth attending, because they conveyed an idea of the ways of society before the Revolution. There was one old French marquis, a contemporary of Madame de Villette's, who regularly came with his *chapeau-bras* under his arm, to pay her his respects, and to talk over the good old times when both were young. Voltaire had called her "*Belle et Bonne*," and by these epithets her friend the Marquis saluted her to her dying day.

"*Belle et bonne Marquise*," (and she had long ceased to be "*belle;*" even the other adjective was a matter of doubt,) "do you know why I preserve this old hat with so much care,—with reverence, I may say?" said this friend to her one day. "Years ago it had the privilege of saving your lovely cheek from being cut by the glass of your carriage-window, when by some mal-adroitness you were on the point of being overturned, *ma belle et bonne Marquise*."

February.—We are staying with a French family of the middle class; and I cannot help noticing the ways of daily life here, so different from those of England. We are a

party of seven; and we live on the fourth floor, which is extensive enough to comprise the two sitting-rooms, the bedrooms, the kitchen, and the chamber for the two maids. I do not dislike this plan of living in a flat, especially as it is managed in Paris. I have seen the same mode adopted in Edinburgh and Rome, besides other continental towns; but, as in these towns there is no *concierge*, I have never liked it so much as in Paris. Here it seems to me to save one servant's work, at the least: and, besides this, there is the moral advantage of uniting mistresses and maids in a more complete family bond. I remember a very charming young married lady, who had been brought by her husband from the country to share his home in Ashley Buildings, Victoria Street, saying that she had two of her former Sunday scholars as servants, but that, if they had had to live in the depths of a London kitchen, she should not have tried bringing them out of their primitive country homes; as it was, she could have them under her own eye without any appearance of watching them; and, besides this, she could hear of their joys and sorrows and, by taking an interest in their interests, induce them to care for hers. French people appear to me to live in this pleasant kind of familiarity with their servants —a familiarity which does not breed contempt, in spite of proverbs.

The *concierge* here receives letters and parcels for the different families in the house, which he generally brings up himself, or sends by one of his family. Sometimes they are kept in the compartments appropriated to each family in the *conciergerie;* and any one of the inhabitants who may return to the house looks in, and seldom fails to have the complaisance to bring up letters, cards, or parcels for any family living below his *étage*. The *concierge* is paid by the landlord for these services, in which is included the carrying up or down of a moderate quantity of luggage. A certain portion of every load of wood or coal belongs to the *concierge*, as payment for carrying it up to the respective apartments for which it is destined. If he cleans the shoes and knives for

any family, they pay him separately. He also expects an *étrenne* from each of the *locataires* on New Year's day; say a napoleon from each family, and half that sum from any bachelors lodging in the house. Very often he knows how to wait at table, and his services are available for a consideration to any one living in the house. But he must always provide a deputy in case of absence from his post. As the *concierges* are, however, generally married, this does not press very hard upon him.

In the house where we are staying, the custom is for every one going out at night to lock up their apartment, desiring the servants to go to bed at the usual time; to hide the key in some well-known and customary place (under the door-mat for instance), and to take a bed-candle down to the *conciergerie*. When we return from our party, or whatever it may be, we ring the bell, and the *concierge*,—perhaps asleep in bed in his little *cabinet*,—"pulls the string, and the latch flies up," as in the days of Little Red Ridinghood; we come in, shut the great *porte-cochère*, open the ever-unfastened door of the *conciergerie*, light our own particular bed-candles at the dim little lamp, pick out any letters, &c., belonging to us, which may have come in by the late post, and go quietly up stairs. This sounds unsafe to our English ears, as it would seem that any one might come in; but I believe there is a small window of inspection in all *conciergeries* which may be used in cases of suspicion. The French at any rate esteem it more safe than our self-contained houses; and French servants in a modest household, where no personal attendants are kept, would be very indignant if they had to sit up for their mistresses' gaieties. For, as a rule, French servants are up earlier than English ones.

In this house is a *salle-à-manger* with a fire-place, and a parquetted floor without a carpet. The shape is an oblong, with the two corners near the door of entrance cut off to form cupboards. The walls are wainscoted with deal, that is afterwards painted oak. The window-curtains and *portières* are made of handsome dark Algerine stripe. As far as I can

see, carpets are not considered a necessary article of furniture in France, but *portières* are. And, certainly, the rich folds of the latter, and the polished floors, off which every crumb or drop of grease is cleansed immediately, take my fancy very much. A door on one side of the windows opens into Madame's room; on the opposite side, another leads into the drawing-room.

If we were French we should have a cup of *café-au-lait* and piece of bread brought into our bedrooms every morning; but, in deference to us as strangers, a tray (without a napkin) with sugar, a copper pan containing the boiling milk just taken off the kitchen fire, and the white covered jug of bright strong coffee, is put on the dining-room table. Also, in deference to our English luxury, there is a plate of butter; our French friends never take butter, and not always bread, at this early breakfast. But where is the bread? I look round, and at last see a basket, about a yard high, standing on the ground near the fireplace; it is of dimensions just sufficient to hold a roll of bread a yard long and more, and about as thick as a man's wrist. It looks like a veritable staff of life. None of our French friends think of completing their toilette for this early breakfast, which indeed, as I have said, they would have taken in their bedrooms, if we had not been here. Nor, indeed, is it any family gathering. I sometimes see the old black skirts of our hostess quickly vanishing into her bedroom at the sound of my approach; and perhaps I find Nanette, the youngest daughter, in a coloured petticoat and white camisole, her thick black hair put neatly away under a cap which is on the full-dress side of a nightcap. She reddens a little as she wishes me *Bon jour*, as she knows that hers is not the finished morning-toilette of an English young lady. But, two hours hence, who so neat as Nanette in her clean print-gown of some delicate pattern, her black hair all brushed, and plaited, and waved, and *crêpé?* For now she has done her household work; perhaps she has helped Julie to make her own bed; she has certainly dusted her room, with all its knick-knacks and ornaments.

Madame, too, has been out to market; half across Paris, it may be, in her old black gown, to some shop she knows of, where she fancies such and such an article can be had better or cheaper. She has gone by the omnibus, taking advantage of the *correspondance*, by which, on payment of thirty centimes, and declaring her wish for a *correspondance* ticket to the *conducteur* of that which passes her door, she is conveyed in it to the general omnibus office, close to the Place des Victoires, where she may have to wait for a few minutes for an omnibus going in the direction for which her *correspondance* ticket is taken. If she has to return by any of the midway stations at which omnibuses stop, she has to purchase a ticket with a number upon it at the *bureau*, and await her turn, at busy times of the day —say at five o'clock, at the Place Palais-Royal. Her number may be eighty-seven, while the next Grenelle omnibus is filling with twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five, and so on, as the *conducteur* calls the numbers. But in the morning they are not so crowded; and Madame is always at home, and dressed with delicate neatness, by eleven o'clock, the time of our "second *déjeûner*," or what we should call lunch in England. This breakfast consists generally of cold meat, a *rechauffé* of some *entrée* or dressed vegetables of the day before, an omelette, bread, wine, and a pot of *confitures*. For us our kind hostess has tea; but I can see that this is not their ordinary custom. It is curious to see how little butter is eaten in a French family; they, however, make up for this by the much greater use of it in cookery; for vegetables form a dish by themselves, always requiring either gravy, butter, or oil, in their preparation. After lunch is over, we all sit down to work; perhaps Nanette practises a little, and perhaps some of us go out for a walk, but always with some object, either of pleasure or business. A Frenchwoman never takes a walk in the English constitutional sense. There are books about in the *salon*, but not so many as in England. They have nothing equivalent to "Mudie" in Paris, and the books of their circulating

libraries are of so very mixed a character, that no careful mother likes to have them lying about on the table. Indeed, "novels and romances" are under much the same ban as they were under in England seventy or eighty years ago. There is the last *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and a pamphlet or two besides, lying by Madame's work-basket, and there are the standard French authors in the bookcase in the cupboard. Yet, somehow, my friends always know what is going on in the literary world of Paris. The newspapers here are so doctored that they are deprived of much of the interest which usually attaches to political news; but I generally see *La Presse* lying about.

Once a week, Madame "receives." Then the covers are taken off the furniture in the *salon;* a fresh nosegay is put in the vase; Madame and Mademoiselle and Nanette put off their final dressing for the day till after the second breakfast, and then appear in the gowns they wear on *jours de fêtes.* Monsieur keeps out of the way, but nevertheless is much disappointed if, when we all meet together at dinner, we have not accumulated a little stock of news and gossip to amuse him with. Madame's day of reception is well known to all her friends and acquaintances, who make a point of calling on her two or three times a season. But sometimes no one comes at all on the Thursdays, and it is rather flat to sit from two to five or thereabouts in our company dresses, with our company faces, all for no use. Then again, on other Thursdays, the room is quite full, and I sit and admire Madame's tact. A new arrival comes up to her, and, without appearing to displace any one, the last comer invariably finds an empty chair by the lady of the house. The hostess also accompanies every departing guest to the room-door, and they part with pretty speeches of affection and good-will, sincere enough, I do not doubt, but expressive of just those feelings which the English usually keep in the background.

On Thursdays we have generally much the same sort of dinner that in England we associate with the idea of washing-days; for both Julie and Gabrielle have been busy

admitting or letting out visitors; or at any rate Madame anticipated this probability when she ordered dinner.

The dinner-hour is six o'clock; real, sharp six. And here I may warn my English friends of the necessity of punctuality to the hour specified in a French dinner invitation. In England, a quarter of an hour beyond the time is considered as nothing, and half an hour's grace is generally acceded. But it is not so in France; and it is considered very ill-bred to be behind the time. And this remark applies not merely to the middle-class life I have been describing, but to the highest circles. Indeed, the French have an idea that punctuality is a virtue unknown among the English; and numerous were the stories of annoyance from English unpunctuality which the French officers brought home from the Crimea. But, to return to our day at Madame ——'s. We do not dress for dinner, as we should do in England; that ceremony, as they consider it—refreshment, as we should call it—is reserved for the days when we go into society, and then it takes place after dinner.

We have soup—always good. On Fridays we have fish; not from any religious feeling, but because that is the day when the best fish is brought into Paris, and it is not very fresh even then. Then we have a made-dish, or two or three times a week the *bouilli* from which the stock for the soup is made—a tender, substantial, little hunch of boiled beef of no known joint. Then come the vegetables, cooked with thick rich gravy, which raises them to the rank they hold in a French dinner, instead of being merely an accessory to the meat, as they are in England. The *rôti* and the salad follow. The mixing of the salad is too important an operation to be trusted to a servant. As we are here, Madame does not like to leave her visitors; but I see Gabrielle peep from behind the *portières*, and make a sign to Mademoiselle, about five minutes before dinner; and Mademoiselle goes into the *salle-à-manger*, and Madame rather loses the thread of her discourse, and looks wistfully after her daughter; for, if Monsieur is particular about anything, it is about his

salads. Strictly speaking, Madame tells me, the vegetables ought to be gathered while the soup is on the table, washed and cleansed while we are eating the *bouilli*, and sliced and dressed with the proper accompaniments while the *rôti* is being brought in. Madame's mother always mixed it at the table, she says, and I have no doubt Madame follows the hereditary precedent herself, when she has no foreign visitors staying with her. After this, a chocolate custard, or a sweet omelette, a *purée* of apples, perhaps; and then dessert is put on the table—a bit of *gruyère* cheese under a glass, and the "*Quatre Mendiants*," *i.e.*, nuts, almonds, raisins, figs, called after the four begging Orders of friars, because these fruits are so cheap that any beggar can have them.

We have a little cup of black coffee all round, when we return to the *salon;* and, if we were not here, our friends would have nothing more that night; but out of compliment to us there is tea at nine o'clock, that is to say, there is hot water with a spoonful of tea soaked in it. They look upon this mixture in much the same light as we consider sal volatile—not quite as a dram, but as something that ought to be used medicinally, and not as a beverage.

March 10*th.*—Madame and I have had a long talk about prices, expenditure, &c. As far as I can make out, provisions are to the full as dear as in London; house-rent is dearer, servants' wages are much the same. She pays her cook and housemaid four hundred and fifty and four hundred francs respectively. But the household work is differently arranged to what it is in England. The cook takes the entire charge of a certain portion of the apartment, bedrooms included; the housemaid attends to the rest, waits at table, helps one of the daughters of the house to get up the fine linen, and renders them any little services they may require in dressing. The cook is enabled to take part of the household-work, because it is the custom in Paris to prepare provisions in the shops where they are sold, so that the cook can buy a sweetbread, or small joint, or poultry, ready-larded, the spinach ready-boiled and pulped for a *purée*, vegetables all

cut into shapes for her soup, and so on. The milk, which I had remarked upon as so remarkably good, is, it appears, subjected to the supervision of inspectors armed with *lactomètres*, delicately-weighted glass-tubes marked with degrees: this ought to sink up to a particular number in good unadulterated milk, and all that is brought into Paris is tested in this and other ways at the various *barrières*. It is very difficult, however, to obtain milk in the afternoons or evenings, even at the *crêmeries*, without ordering it beforehand. The Government regulates the price of bread, which is lower in Paris than in the neighbouring towns; the legal tariff is exposed in every baker's shop, and false weights and measures are severely punished.

As to dress, from what I can gather, I think that good articles bear the same price as in England; but in our shops it is difficult to meet with an inferior article in even moderately good taste, while in France those who are obliged to consider expense can find cheap materials of the most elegant design. Then French ladies give up so much more thought and time to dress than the English do; I mean in such ways as changing a gown repeatedly in the course of a day if occasion requires, taking care never to wear a better dress when an inferior one will do—no! not even for five unnecessary minutes. And, when handsome articles are taken off, they are put by with as much care as if they were sleeping babies laid down in a cot. Silver paper is put between every fold of velvet or of silk; cushions of paper are placed so as to keep the right sit of any part; ribbons are rolled up; soiled spots are taken out immediately; and thus the freshness of dress which we so much admire in Frenchwomen is preserved; but, as I said, at a considerable expense of time and thought in the case of people of moderate means. Madame —— declares that she knows many a young French couple who have reduced their table to the lowest degree of meagreness, in order that the wife (especially) might be well dressed. She says that dress is the only expenditure for which a Frenchwoman will go into debt.

I remember some years ago hearing a letter from the Prince de Ligne read at Lord E——'s. He gave an account in it of the then recent coronation at Moscow, and went on to speak of the French Emperor's politics. As one of his engines of influence, the Prince gravely named *le luxe de la toilette*, as an acknowledged political means. At the time, I remember, I wondered in silence; but things have come to my knowledge since then which make me understand what was then meant. Six years ago a friend took me to call on Madame de ——. It was a raw, splashy, February day; and, as we walked through the slushy streets, half-covered with melting snow, my friend told me something about the lady we were going to see. Madame de —— was married to the eldest son of a Frenchman of rank; she herself belonged to an old family. Her husband was a distinguished member of one of the Academies, and held a high position among those who had devoted themselves to his particular branch of recondite knowledge. Madame de —— was one of the *lionnes* of Paris, and as a specimen of her class we were now going to see her. She and her husband had somewhere about seven thousand a year; but for economy's sake they lived in an apartment rather than a house. They had, I think, two or three children. I recollect feeling how out of place my substantial winter-dress and my splashed boots were, the moment I entered the little hall or anteroom of her apartment.

The floor was covered with delicate Indian matting, and round the walls ran a bordering of snowdrops, crocuses, violets, and primroses, as fresh and flowering as if they were growing in a wood, but all planted by some Paris gardener in boxes of soil, and renewed perpetually. Then we went into the lady's own boudoir. She was about thirty, of a very peculiar style of beauty, which grew upon me every moment I looked. She had black hair, long black curling eyelashes, long soft grey eyes, a smooth olive skin, a dimple, and most beautiful teeth. She was in mourning; her thick hair fastened up with great pins of pearls and amethysts, her

ear-rings, brooch, bracelets, all the same. Her gown was of black watered silk, lined with violet silk (wherever a lining could be seen), her boots black watered silk, her petticoat of stiff white silk, with a wreath of violet-coloured embroidery just above the hem. Her manners were soft and caressing to the last degree; and, when she was told that I had come to see her as a specimen of her class, she was prettily amused, and took pains to show me all her arrangements and *coquetteries*. In her boudoir there was not a speck of gilding; that would have been bad taste, she said. Around the mirrors, framed in white polished wood, creeping plants were trained so that the tropical flowers fell over and were reflected in the glass. There was a fire, fed with cedar-wood chips; and the crimson velvet curtains on each side of the grate had perfumes quilted within their white silk linings. The window-curtains were trimmed with point lace. We went through a little ante-chamber to Madame de ——'s bed-room—an oblong room, with her bed filling up half the space on one side; the other all wardrobe, with six or seven doors covered with looking-glass, and opening into as many closets. After we had admired the rare Palissy ware, the lace draperies of the mirror, the ornaments on the toilette-table, and the pink silk curtains of the bed, she laughed her little soft laugh, and told me that now I should see how she amused herself as she lay in bed of a morning: and pulling something like a bell-rope which hung at the head of her bed, the closet doors flew open, and displayed gowns hung on wire frames (such as you may see at any milliner's): gowns for the evening, and gowns for the morning, with the appropriate head-dresses, *chaussures*, and gloves, lying by them.

"I have not many gowns," said she. "I do not like having too many, for I never wear them after they are a month old; I give them to my maid then, for I never wear anything that is old-fashioned."

I was quite satisfied with my *lionne*. She was quite as much out of the way of anything I had ever seen before

as I had expected. But, to go on with the bearing she had upon the Prince de Ligne's letter, I must not forget to say that Madame de —— expressed very strong political opinions, and all distinctly anti-Bonapartean. Among other things she mentioned was the fact that, when her husband went to pay his respects as a member of the Academy of ——, to the Emperor at the Tuileries, she would not allow him to use their carriage (nor indeed was he willing to do it, but went in a hackney coach), saying that the arms of the de ——s should never be seen in the courts of a usurper. Two years afterwards I came to Paris, and I inquired after M. and Madame de ——. To my infinite surprise, I heard that he had become a senator, one of that body who receive about a thousand pounds a year from Government, and who are admitted to that dignity by the express will of the Emperor. How in the world could it have come about? And Madame, too, at all the balls and receptions at the Tuileries! The arms of the de —— were no longer invisible in the courts of a usurper. What was the reason of this change? Madame's extravagance. Their income would not suffice for her *luxe de toilette*, and the senator's salary was a very acceptable addition.

April 24th.—We were asked to go in some evening, *pour dire le petit bon-soir*, at a neighbour's house. Accordingly we walked thither about eight o'clock. M. E——'s house is one of the most magnificent in this *quartier:* it is on the newly-built Boulevard de Sévastopol. M. E—— himself is a leading man in his particular branch of trade, which, in fact, he has made himself; and he is now a French millionaire, as different from an English one as francs are different from pounds. I remember, when I first knew monsieur and madame, they lived in an apartment over the shop; and this was situated in one of the narrow old streets of the Quartier Latin. I was asked there to dinner, and I had to make my way through bales of goods, that were piled as high as walls on each side of the narrow passage through the shop. I went through madame's

bed-room, furnished with purple velvet and amber satin, to the room where we assembled before dinner.

It was a weekly dinner, at which all M. E——'s family came, as a matter of course; and any one connected with him in business was also sure of finding a place there. The table was spread with every luxury, and there was almost an ostentatious evidence of wealth, which contrasted oddly and simply with the hard signs of business and trade down below. I fancy their way of living at that time must have been like that of the great old City families of the last century. And there was another resemblance. Two generations ago it was customary for our own London merchants to retain their married children under the paternal roof, for the first year at least; and so it was at M. E——'s. His own child, his wife's children—for they had each been married before—lived in the same house as he did, both in winter and summer, in town and country. Yet the younger generation were all married, and had families. All the grandchildren, little and big, were assembled at these weekly dinners; if there was not room for them at the principal table, there were nurses and servants ready to attend upon them at side-tables. And now, when increasing and well-deserved prosperity has enabled M. E—— to remove into the large hotel to which we have been to-night, to "say our little good-evening," I find that his sons and his daughters, his maid-servants and his men-servants, have all migrated with him in truly patriarchal fashion.

We did not see them all to-night, for some have already gone into the country, whither the others are going to follow in a day or two. Out of compliment to us, tea was brought in—tea at a guinea the pound, as Madame E—— informed us. I saw that the family did not like the drink well enough to wish to join us. There was a little telegraphing as to who was to be the victim, and keep us company; and the young lady singled out as the tea-drinker for the family took care to put in so much sugar that I doubt if she could recognise the flavour of anything else. The others

excused themselves from taking tea by saying—one, that she had been so feverish all day; another, that he felt himself a good deal excited, and so on. Sugar is considered by the French as fitted to soothe the nerves, and to induce sleep. I really am becoming a convert to this idea, and can take my glass of *eau sucrée* as well as any one before going to bed; indeed, we have a little tray in our bed-room, on which is a Bohemian glass caraffe of water, a goblet with a gold spoon, and a bowl of powdered sugar. But I think it is a drink for society, not for solitude. Inspirited by the example of others, I relish it; but I never tipple at it in private.

Somehow, to-night we began to talk upon the custom of different families of relations living together. I said it would never do in England. They asked me, why not? And, after some reflection, I was obliged to confess we all liked our own ways too much to be willing to give them up at the will of others—were too independent, too great lovers of our domestic privacy. I am afraid I gave the impression that we English were too ill-tempered and unaccommodating; for I drew down upon myself a vehement attack upon the difficulties thrown in the way of young people's marrying in England.

"Even when there is a great large house, and a table well-spread enough to fill many additional mouths, they tell me that in England the parents will go on letting their sons and daughters waste the best years of their lives in long engagements," said Madame E——. "That does not sound to me amiable."

"It is not the custom in France," put in her husband. "You English are apt to think us bad-tempered, because we talk loud, and use a good deal of gesticulation; but I believe we are one of the most good-tempered nations going, in spite of the noise we make."

By-and-by, some one began to speak of *Les Misérables;* and M. E——, like a prosperous merchant as he is, objected to the socialist tendency of the book. From that we went

on talking about a *grève* (or strike) which had lately taken place among the builders in Paris. They had obtained their point, whatever it was, because it was the supreme aim of the Government to keep the "blouses"—the Faubourg St. Antoine—in good-humour; and "Government," in fact, has the regulation of everything in France. M. E—— said that the carpenters were now about to strike, encouraged by the success of the builders, and that he heard from his own carpenter that the object they were going to aim at was that skilled and unskilled labour should be paid at the same rate—viz., five francs a-day. He added that the carpenter, his informant, looked upon this project with disfavour, saying it might be all very well as long as there was enough of work for all; but, when it grew scarce, none but the best workmen would have any employment, as no one would send for an inferior craftsman, when he could have a first-rate one for the same money.

May 4th.—It is becoming intolerably hot in Paris. I almost wish the builders would strike, for my part, for the carriages scarcely cease rumbling past my open windows before two; and at five the men are clapping and hammering at the buildings of the new boulevard opposite. I have had to go into the narrow streets of the older parts of Paris lately; and the smells there are insufferable—a mixture of drains and cookery, which makes one loathe one's food. Yet how interesting these old streets are! and the people inhabiting them are quite different to those of the more fashionable quarters: they have so much more originality of character about them; and yet one sees that they are the descendants of the Dames de la Halle, who went out to Versailles on the memorable fifth of October.

I see curious little customs too in these more primitive parts of the town. Every morning a certain number of Sisters of Charity put themselves at the disposal of the *Mairie* of the *Arrondissements*. There were formerly only twelve *arrondissements;* but now, owing to the extension of the city of Paris, there are twenty. In the former days,

before the annexation of the suburbs to the city in 1859, by which the number of the *arrondissements* was increased to twenty, it was "slang" to speak of any disreputable person as belonging to the *treizième*—an *arrondissement* not recognised by any law. Every such division has a *maire* and two *adjoints*, who are responsible for the well-doing and well-being of the district in their charge. I see the "Sisters" leaving the *Mairie* on their errands of mercy early every morning. About the same time the *chiffonier* comes his rounds, eagerly raking out the heaps of dust and rubbish before the doors. Then, by-and-by—generally, however, after eleven, that universal meal-hour—I meet an old woman busily trotting along towards the Luxembourg Gardens, surrounded by fifteen or twenty little children, aged from two or three years to seven or eight. Their parents pay the old lady about ten centimes an hour to take their children out, and give them a walk or a game of play in the gardens.

It is pretty to see her convoy her little regiment over a crossing; it reminds me of the old puzzle of the fox, the goose, and the bag of corn. The elder children are left in charge on one side, while the very little ones are carried over; then one of the oldest is beckoned across and lectured on her care of them, while the old woman trots back for the rest; and I notice she is much more despotic during her short reign of power than the old woman herself. At length they are past all dangers, and safe in the gardens, where they may make dirt-pies to their hearts' content, while their chaperon takes out her knitting and seats herself on a bench in their midst. Say she has fifteen children, and keeps them out for two hours, it makes her a little income of half-a-crown a day; and many a busy mother is glad that her child should have happy play and exercise, while she goes a-shopping, or does some other piece of house-keeping work, which would prevent her from attending properly to her child. Each *mairie* has its *salle d'asile* (or infant-school) and its *crêche* (or public nursery), under the superintendence of the "Sisters;" but perhaps these are for a

lower class than my little Luxembourg friends. Their mothers are, for the most part, tolerably well off, only not rich enough to keep a servant expressly for the children.

Then the shop-placards in these old-fashioned parts of the town are often amusing enough. For instance: the other day I saw a crowd in a by-street, near the Rue l'École de Médecine, all intent upon a great piece of written paper put out of the window of a shop, where almost every article of woman's dress was to be sold. It was headed, in letters almost a quarter of a yard long:

MA FEMME EST FOLLE.

A person, of whom I asked the meaning, laughed a little as he said—

"Oh! it is only a contrivance for attracting custom. He goes on to state, lower down in the paper, that his wife, being mad, offered certain gown-pieces for sale yesterday at a ruinous price (they are really only about half a franc lower than what you can get them for at any other shop); that he is miserable in the conflict he is undergoing between his honour and the prospect of the sacrifice he will have to make, if he sells them at the price his wife offered them for; but, 'Honour above all,' they shall be sold at that price, and therefore every one had better rush in and buy."

May 7th.—Seeing an apartment to let in the Place Royale, we went over it yesterday. I have always liked the looks of this stately old *place;* so full of historical associations too. Then, again, the quietness of it charms me; it is almost like a cloister, for no carriages can come in; and the sheltered walks under the arcades must be very pleasant to the inhabitants on rainy days. The houses are built of very handsome red bricks with stone-facings, and all after the same plan, designed by an architect of the time of Henry IV.—about our Queen Elizabeth's reign; but, if the Place Royale were in England, we should date it, judging from the style of the architecture, a century later at least. It is more like the later additions to Hampton Court. There is a

pleasant square in the centre, with a fountain, shady chestnut trees, and gay flower-beds, and a statue of Louis XIII. in the midst. Tradition says, that it was either on this piece of ground, or very near it, that the famous masque took place in the old Palace des Tournelles, when, the dresses of the masquers catching fire, King Charles VI., who was one of them, became mad in consequence of the fright; and, it was to soothe his madness, that our present playing-cards were invented.

When first the present place was built, all the fashionable world rushed to secure houses in it. This was the old hotel of the De Rohans; that was Cardinal de Richelieu's before his Palais Cardinal—the present Palais Royal—was completed; in this house Madame de Sévigné was born—and so on. Now, the ground floor, which was formerly occupied by the offices of the great houses above, is turned into shops, ware-houses, and *cafés* of a modest and substantial kind; and the upper floors are inhabited by respectable and well-to-do people, who do not make the least pretension to fashion. The apartment we went over consisted of five handsome and very lofty reception-rooms, opening out of one another and lighted by many high narrow windows, opening on to a wide balcony at the top of the arcade. One or two of these rooms were panelled with looking-glass, but old-fashioned, in many pieces, not like our modern plates in size. Possibly it was Venetian, and dated from the times of the early proprietors.

The great height of the rooms, as compared to their area, struck me much. Only two or three of the rooms had fire-places, and these were vast and cavernous. Besides the doors of communication between the rooms, there was, in each, one papered like the walls, opening into a passage which ran the whole length of the apartment. On the opposite side of this passage there were doors opening into the kitchens, store-rooms, servants' bed-rooms, &c.—so small, so close, so unhealthy. Yet in those days there were many servants and splendid dinners. Perhaps, however, some of

the lacqueys slept on the upper floor, to which there is now no access from the apartments *au premier*. At the end of the passage was the bed-room of the late proprietress, with a closet opening out of it for her maid. The bed-room was spacious and grand enough; but the closet—well, I suppose she *could* lie full length in it, if she was not tall. The only provision for light and air was a window opening on to the passage. We inquired the rent of this apartment: 3000 francs —£120. But perhaps *Monsieur le propriétaire* might reduce it to 2500 francs—£100. The front-rooms were charming in their old-fashioned stateliness; but, if I lived there, I should be sorely perplexed as to where my servants were to sleep.

May 10*th*.—Utterly weary of the noise and heat of Paris, we went out to St. Germain yesterday. I had never been there before; and now, once having been, I want to go again. It is only half-an-hour from Paris by railroad. We could just see Malmaison as we went along, past pretty villas with small gardens brilliant with flowers, as French gardens always are. All the plants seem to go into flower; the mass of bloom almost over-balances the leaves. I believe this is done by skilful pruning and cutting-in. For instance, they take up their rose-trees at the beginning of February, and cut off the coarse red suckers and the superfluous growth of root. The hedges to these little suburban gardens are principally made of acacia, and pollard trees of the same species border nearly all the roads near Paris. In the far distance, on the left, almost against the horizon, we saw the famous Aqueduct de Marly, formerly used to conduct a part of the water to Versailles. I do not know what it is in the long line of aqueducts and viaducts which charms one. Is it the vanishing perspective which seems to lead the eye, and through it the mind, to some distant invisible country? or is it merely the association with other aqueducts, with the broken arches of the Claudian aqueduct, stretching across the Campagna, with Nismes, &c.? By means of some skilfully-adjusted atmospheric power, the trains have of late years been conducted up to nearly the level of the terrace at

St. Germain's by a pretty steep inclined plane. We went up a few steps on leaving the station, and then we were on the plateau, the castle on our left, and a *Place* at the entrance to the town on the right.

Nothing could be more desolate-looking than the château; the dull-red bricks of which it is built are painted dark-lead colour round the many tiers of windows, the glass in which is broken in numerous places, its place being here and there supplied by iron bars. Somehow, the epithet that rose to our lips on first seeing the colouring of the whole place, was "livid." Nor is the present occupation of the grim old château one to suggest cheerful thoughts. After being a palace, it was degraded to a *caserne*, or barracks, and from that it has come down to be a penitentiary. All round the building there is a deep dry area, railed round; and now I have said all I can against St. Germain and recorded a faithful impression at first sight. But, two minutes afterwards, there came a lovely slant of sun-light; the sun had been behind a fine thunderous cloud, and emerged just at the right moment, causing all the projections in the château to throw deep shadows, brightening the tints in all the other parts, calling out the vivid colours in the flower-beds that surround the railing on the park side of the château, and half-compelling us with its hot brilliancy, half luring us by the full fresh green it gave to the foliage, to seek the shelter of the woods not two hundred yards beyond the entrance to the park.

We did not know where we were going to, we only knew that it was shadowed ground; while the "English garden" we passed over was all one blaze of sunlight and scarlet geraniums, and intensely blue lobelias, yellow calceolarias, and other hot-looking flowers. The space below the ancient mighty oaks and chestnut-trees was gravelled over, and given up to nursery-maids and children, with here and there an invalid sitting on the benches. Mary and Irène were bent upon sketching; so we wandered on to find the impossible point of view which is to combine all the excellences desired by two eager sketchers. So we loitered over another

hundred yards in the cool shade of the trees. And suddenly we were on the terrace, looking down over a plain steeped in sunlight, and extending for twenty miles and more. We all exclaimed with delight at its unexpectedness; and yet we had heard of the terrace at St. Germain, and associated it with James II. and Maria d'Este all our lives. The terrace is a walk as broad as a street, on the edge of the bluff overhanging the silver tortuous Seine. It is bounded by a wall, just the right height for one to lean upon and gaze and muse upon the landscape below. The mellow mist of a lovely day enveloped the more distant objects then; but we came again in the evening, when all the gay world of St. Germain was out and abroad on the terrace listening to the music of the band; and we could then distinguish the aqueduct of Marly on our right, before us the old woods of Vesinet—that ill-omened relic of the ancient forest that covered the Ile de France; and here in the very centre is the star-shaped space called *La Table de la Trahison;* here it was that Ganelan de Hauteville planned to betray Roland the Brave and the twelve peers of France, at Roncevaux; and on the very spot the traitors were burnt to death by the order of Charlemagne.

Beyond Vesinet rise the fortified heights of Mont Valérien and Montmartre; so we know that the great city of Paris, with its perpetual noise and bustle, must be the cause of that thickening of the golden air just beyond the rising ground in the mid-distance. And some one found out—far away again—as far as eye could see, the spire of the Cathedral of St. Denis, and Irene fell to moralizing and comparing. The palace, she said, was ever present—an every-day fact to the great old kings who had inhabited it—and fertile life and busy pomp were the golden interspace which all but concealed from them the inevitable grave at St. Denis. But sermons always make me hungry; and Irene's moralising seemed to have the same effect on herself as well as on us, or else it was the "nimble" air—for that epithet of Shakspeare's exactly fits the clear brisk air of St. Germain.

They sat down to sketch, and I was sent in search of provender.

I could not find a confectioner's, nor, indeed, would it have been of much use, for French confectioners only sell sugary or creamy nothings, extremely unsatisfactory to hungry people. So I went boldly into the restaurant to the right of the station—the Café Galle, I think it was called,—and told the *Dame du Comptoir* my errand. I was in hopes that she would have allowed one of the *garçons* to accompany me with a basket of provisions, and some plates, and knives and forks; perhaps some glasses, and a bottle of wine. But it seemed that this was against the rules; and all I could do was, to have the loan of a basket for a short time. Madame split up some oval rolls of delicious bread, buttered them, and placed some slices of raw ham between the pieces; and with these, and some fresh strawberries, I returned to my merry, hungry sketchers, who were beginning to find that a seat on the hard gravel was not quite so agreeable as sitting on (comparatively) soft English turf. Yet the benches were too high for their purpose. After eating their lunch, they relapsed into silence and hard work.

It was rather dull for me; so I rambled about, struck up an acquaintanceship with one of the gardeners, and with a hackney-coachman, who tried to tempt me into engaging him for a *course* to Versailles by Marly-le-Roi—the Marly, the famous Marly of Louis XIV., of which the faint vestiges alone remain in the marks of the old garden plots. I was tempted. I remembered what St. Simon says; how the king, weary of noise and grandeur, found out a little narrow valley within a few miles of his magnificent and sumptuous Versailles; there was a village near this hollow for it really was nothing more—and this village was called Marly, whence the name of the palace or *hermitage* which the king chose to have built. He thought that he went there to lead a simple and primitive life, away from the flattery of his courtiers. But it is not so easy for a king to avoid flattery. His architect built one great pavilion, which

was to represent the sun; in it dwelt Louis XIV. There were twelve smaller pavilions surrounding this large one; in them dwelt the planets, that is to say, the favourite courtiers of the time being. Every morning the king set out to visit his satellites; there were six on one side of the parterre, six on the other; and their pavilions communicated with each other by means of close avenues of lime-trees. It was etiquette for these courtiers to salute the king, who had taken the sun for his device, by placing their right hand so as to shade their eyes from his brilliancy; hence, some people say, our own military salute. Each courtier, as he was visited, followed the king in his round. At first, the king came to Marly only two or three times a year, staying from Wednesday to Saturday; he only brought a comparatively moderate train; but in time he grew weary of his so-called simplicity, and the surrounding hills were scooped out to make gardens, and woods, and waterworks; and statues and courtiers thronged the place. Still, as no one could come here without express invitation from the king, to be of the parties to Marly was an object to be longed for, and asked for, and intrigued for. Indeed, it was the highest favour that could be obtained from royalty. At the last moment of awful suspense as to who was to go, the king's *valet de chambre*, Bontemps, went round with the invitations. There was no need of preparation, for in each pavilion there was a store of all things needed for masculine and feminine toilettes. Only two could inhabit a pavilion; and, if a married lady was asked, her husband was included in the invitation, though not in the compliment.

But, to the end of his reign, the days for Marly were invariable. Sunday the King spent, as became the eldest son of the Church, at his parish of Versailles; Monday and Tuesday he allowed himself to be worshipped by the whole court at Versailles; on Wednesday he went to Marly with the selected few. The amusements at Marly were high play, or, as it might be called, gambling; and a kind of bazaar, where the ladies dressed themselves up as Syrians, Japanese,

Greeks, what not, and played at keeping shop; the king furnishing the infinite variety of things sold. Louis XV. and his unfortunate successor went to Marly occasionally; but the great days of Marly were over when Louis XIV. died. After that, the Governor of St. Germain kept the keys of Marly, and occasionally lent the use of the pavilions to his private friends. But the Convention did not approve of this appropriation of national property; and the old statues, the remains of magnificent furniture, the marbles, and the mirrors, were sold for the good of the people. Some one bought the buildings and turned them into a spinning-mill; but it was not a profitable speculation, and by-and-by the whole place was pulled down; but I believe you may yet trace out the foundations of the Palace of the Sun. So that was why I wanted to see Marly—a place once so famous and so populous gone to ruin, nay, the very ruins themselves covered up by nature with her soft harmony of grass and flowers.

How much would it cost, how long would it take, I asked the hackney-coachman, to go by Marly to Versailles in time to catch the last train thence to Paris? It would take an hour, not including any stopping at Marly, and it would cost fifteen francs, also not including any stoppage at Marly. I was vexed at the man for thinking I could be so grossly imposed upon. Why, two francs an hour, with a decent *pour-boire*, was on the tariff of every carriage; so I turned away in silent indignation, heedless of his cries of "*Dix francs, madame. Tenez! huit—cinq—ce que vous voulez, madame!*"

And immediately afterwards I was glad I had not planned to leave St. Germain an hour earlier than was necessary—the place looked so bright and cheerful, with all the gaily-dressed people streaming over the Place du Château, to go to the terrace and hear the band. I went into the restaurant, and ordered coffee to be ready at six, and had a little more gossip with the *Dame du Comptoir*. She told me that no one was admitted to see the interior of the castle, although it was no longer a penitentiary; that the air at St. Germain

was better and purer than at any other place within twenty miles of Paris; and that I ought to come and see the forest of St. Germain at the time of the *Fête des Loges*—a sort of open-air festival held in the forest on the 30th of August; and all the waiters at liberty came forward to make a chorus in praise of the merry-go-rounds, mountebanks, wine, stoves cooking viands, spits turning joints, and general merriment, which seemed to go on at this fair, which took its rise in the pilgrimages made to a certain hermitage built by a devout seigneur of the time of Louis XIII.

Then I went back to Mary and Irene, and told them my adventures; and we all, attracted by the good music of the military band, went on to the crowded terrace and leant over the wall, and saw the view I have described, and gazed down into the green depths of the far-stretching forest, and wondered if we should not have done wiser to have gone thither and spent our day there. And so to our excellent coffee and bread, and then back to Paris.

II

Chartres, May 10th, 1862.

We were quite worn out with the ever increasing noise of Paris; or, perhaps, I should rather say, as the heat became greater, so our necessity for open windows by day and by night increased; and the masons opposite rose to their work with the early morning light. So we determined to go off to Britanny for our few remaining days, having a sort of happy mixture of the ideas of sea, heath, rocks, ferns, and Madame de Sévigné in our heads. The one and first destined point in our plans was to see the cathedral at Chartres.

We left Paris about three o'clock, and went past several stations, the names of which reminded us of Madame de Sévigné's time—Rambouillet, perhaps, the most of all. The station is some distance from the town of Chartres, which,

like so many French provincial towns, consists of a *Place*, and a few appendent streets. The magnificent cathedral stands a little aloof; we left it on one side as we came in an omnibus up to our hotel, which looked on to the *Place*. But alas for my hopes of a quiet night! The space before the house is filled with booths—dancing-booths, acting-booths, wild-beast shows, music-booths, each and all making their own separate and distinct noises; the "touter" to one booth sitting in front of it and blowing a trumpet as hard as any angel in the old pictures; the hero of the theatrical booth walking backwards and forwards in front of his stage, and ranting away in King Cambyses' vein; the lions and tigers are raging with hunger, to judge from their roars; and the musicians are in the full burst of the overture to *Guillaume Tell*. Mary and Irene have gone out, in spite of it all, to have a peep at the cathedral before it is too dark; and I have chosen our bed-rooms. If the lion only knew it, he could easily make a spring into our balcony; but I hope, as he is great, he will be stupid. I have rung the bell, and rung the bell, and gone out in the corridor and called; and, at last, I shall have to go downstairs, to try and find some one to bring up the meal which I have promised the others they shall find ready on their return. I have been and found Madame, and laid my complaint before her. She says the servants are all gone out to see the shows in the Place, which is very wicked in them; but I suspect, from her breathless way of speaking, she has only just rushed in herself, to see that I am not running away with the house. I fancy I am the only person in it. She assures me, with true French volubility, that she will send up some coffee and bread directly, and will scold Jeanette well.

May 11*th*.—Mary and Irene returned from the cathedral last night before anything was ready, and were too full of the extraordinary architectural magnificence they had seen to care about my Martha-like troubles. But I had not seen the cathedral; and I was hungry if they were not. I went down again, and this time I found Madame in full tilt

against an unfortunate woman, who looked as if she had been captured, *vi et armis*, out of the open-air gaiety and the pleasant company of friends in the *Place*. She brought us up our meal with sullen speed, giving me occasionally such scowls of anger that I almost grew afraid at the feeling I had provoked. Yet she refused to be soothed by our little expressions of admiration for the fair, and our questions as to what was to be seen. Her only attempt at an apology was a sort of grumbling soliloquy, to the effect that ladies who knew what was *comme il faut* would never have gone out so late in the evening of a *jour de fête* to walk about the town; and that, as Mary and Irene had done this improper thing, there was no knowing when, if ever, they would return. I wish she had let us try to comfort her, for I really was very sorry to have dragged a poor creature back from what was, perhaps, the great enjoyment of the year. After our coffee we went to bed; and I am not at all sure if we were not, for some hours, the only occupants of the hotel. But the lion did not take advantage of his opportunity, though we were obliged to leave the windows open for the heat. This morning we went to see the cathedral. It is so wonderfully beautiful that no words can describe it. I am thoroughly glad we came by Chartres.

May 12th.—Vitré.—We came on here yesterday afternoon. Irene, who is the most wide-awake person I know, sat upright in the railway-carriage, looking out of the window with eager, intelligent eyes, and noting all she saw. It was a *fête* day; and at all the little cabarets, with their wayside gardens, there were groups of peasants in their holiday dress, drinking what appeared to be cider, from its being in large stone bottles, and eating galette—a sort of flat cake of puff-paste, dusted over with powdered sugar, with which we had become well acquainted in Paris. The eating and drinking seemed, however, to be rather an excuse for sitting round well-scoured tables in the open air, than an object in itself. I sank back in my seat in a lazy, unobservant frame of mind, when Irene called out, "Oh, look! there is a peasant

in the goat-skin dress one reads about; we must be in Britanny now; look, look!" I had to sit up again and be on the alert; all the time thinking how bad for the brain it was to be straining one's attention perpetually after the fast-flitting objects to be seen through a railway carriage window. This is a very good theory; but it did not quite hold water in practice. Irene was as bright as ever when we stopped at Vitré; I was tired and stupid. Perhaps the secret was, that I did unwillingly what she did with pleasure.

The station at Vitré is a little outside the town, and is smart and new and in apple-pie order, as a station on a line that has to make its character ought to be. The town, on the contrary, is ancient, picturesque, and deserted. There have been fortified walls all round it, but these are now broken down in many places, and small hovels have been built of the *débris* wherever this is the case, giving one the impression of a town stuffed too full, which has burst its confines and run over. Yet inside the walls there are many empty houses, and many grand fortified dwellings, with coats of arms emblazoned over the doorway, which are only half-occupied. All the little world of the town seemed to be at the railway-station, and everybody welcomed us with noise and advice. The inn down in our ten-years-old Murray no longer existed; so we were glad to be told of the "Hôtel Sévigné," although we suspected it to be a mere trick of a name. Not at all. We are really veritably lodged in the very house she occupied, when she left Les Rochers to come and do the honours of Vitré to the Governor of Britanny—the Duc de Chaulnes. Our hotel is the "Tour de Sévigné" of her letters. On being told this, I asked for the tower itself. It had been pulled down only a year or two before, in order to make the great rambling mansion more compact as an hotel. As it was, they had changed the main entrance from back to front; and to arrive at it, we had to go over a great piece of vacant irregular ground, the inequalities of which were caused by the *débris* of the tower.

The place belongs to the Marquis de Néthumières, a

descendant of the de Sévignés, so our host said. At any rate, he lives at Les Rochers, and owns our hotel. It seems as though our landlord had not had capital enough to furnish the whole of this immense, far-stretching house, which is entered in the middle of the building with long corridors to the right and to the left, both upstairs and downstairs—corridors so wide and well-lighted by the numerous windows looking to the back (or town-side), that they are used as store-rooms and sculleries. Here there are great sacks of corn and unpacked boxes of possible groceries; there a girl sits and sings as she mends the house-linen by a window, apparently diligent enough, but perfectly aware, all the time, that the ostler in the yard below is trying to attract her attention; and there, again, a woman is standing, shoulders square, to an open window, "topping and tailing" a basket of gooseberries, and shouting out her part of a conversation with some one unseen in the yard below. Yet the great corridor looks empty and strangely deserted. Somehow, I suppose that as soon as I heard the name of "Tour de Sévigné," I expected to see a fair, plump lady, in hanging sleeves and long light-brown ringlets, walking before me wherever I went, half-turning her pretty profile over her white shoulder to say something bright and playful; and, instead, we follow our rather spruce landlord into the bed-rooms at the end of the corridor, and coolly order our dinner for this day of May, 1862.

The rooms in this house are not large, but so very lofty, that I suspect that the panelled partition walls are but later wooden divisions of larger rooms; and so, on tapping, we find to be the case. My window looks out on the country outside the town; Irene's is just on the opposite side, and she sees roofs of deeply furrowed tiles—roofs of every possible angle and shape, but mostly high pitched; they are covered with golden and grey lichens which tone down the old original red. There are broad gutters round the verge of every one, regular cats' Pall Malls. And see, there is an old black grimalkin coming round yonder corner, with meek and sleepy

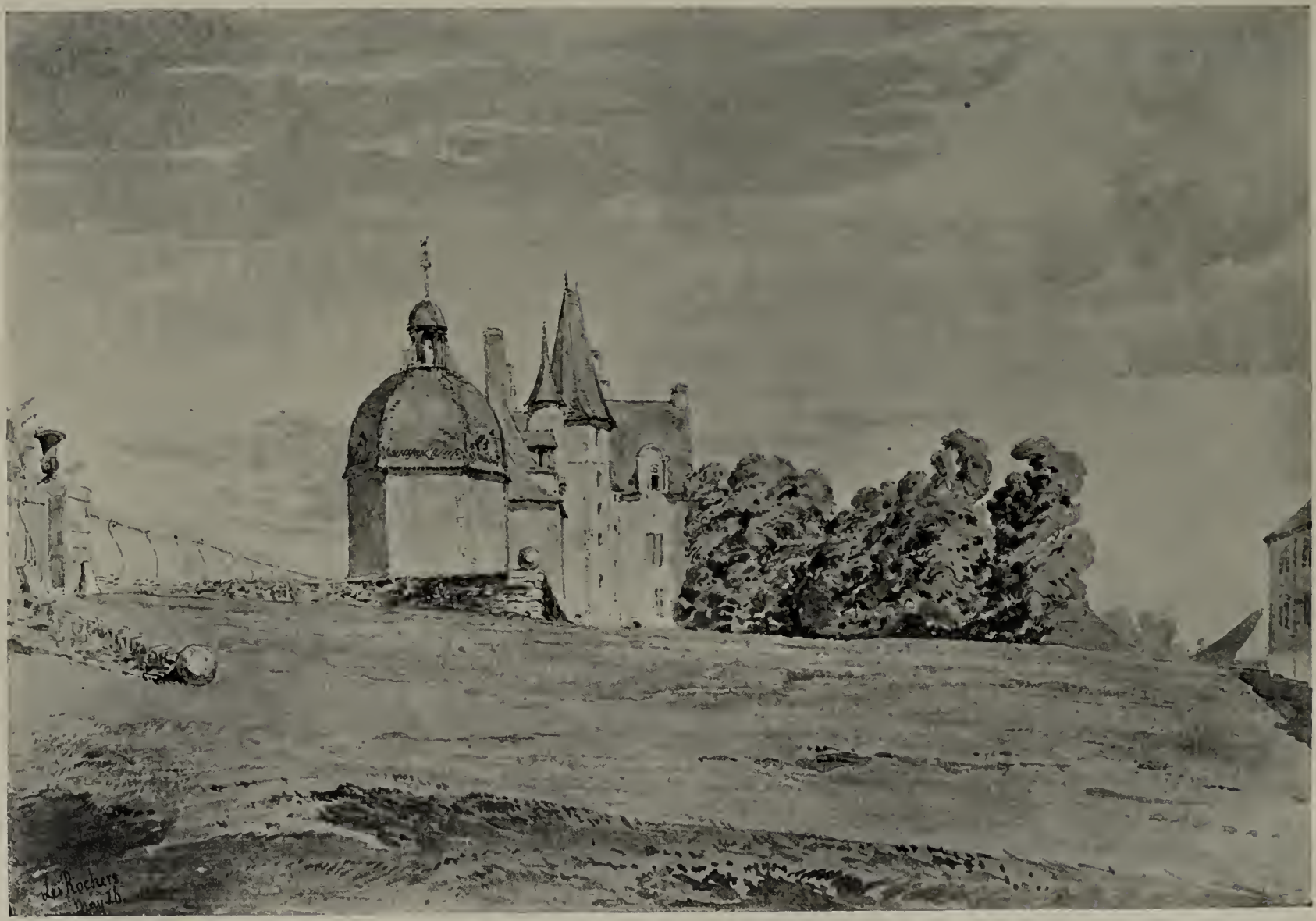
gait, of course entirely unconscious of the flock of pigeons towards which she is advancing with her velvet steps. They strut and pout and ruffle themselves up, turning their pretty soft plumage to the sun till they catch the rainbow tints; and whiff—they are all off in mid-air, and the hypocritical cat has to go on walking in the gutter, as if pigeons had been the last thing in her thoughts when she made that playful spring round the corner. How picturesque the old town looks beyond, though, to be sure, we see little besides roofs —the streets must be so narrow! Let us make haste and have our meal, and go out before the sun sets. Pigeons for dinner! Ah, Pussy, we begin to have a fellow-feeling for you.

May 13*th.*—We have had a busy day, but a very pleasant one. In the first place, we had a long talk with our landlord about the possibility of seeing Les Rochers. The Marquis was very strict about not letting it be shown without his permission, and he and Madame were known to be at Rennes; so we thought of giving it up. Then our landlord turned round in his opinions, and said that doubtless the Marquis and Madame would be very sorry for any foreigners to come so far on a bootless errand; and so—after a good many pro's and con's, we always following our landlord's lead, and agreeing to all that he said, in hopes of getting to the end of the discussion—we made a bargain for a little conveyance, half Irish car, half market cart, which was to take us to Les Rochers, and to stay there as long as we liked. Who so merry as we this bright dewy May morning, cramped up in our jolting, rattling carriage, the fourth place occupied by sketch-books and drawing materials? First, we rattled along the narrow streets of Vitré; the first floors of the houses are propped up upon black beams of wood, making a rude sort of colonnade, under which people walk; something like Chester—and then we passed out of the old turretted gate of the town, into the full and pleasant light of early morning.

We began to climb a hill, the road winding round Vitré,

till we peeped down upon the irregular roofs and stacks of chimneys pent in the circular walls; and we saw the remains of the old castle, inhabited by the Duc and Duchesse de Chaulnes, in the days when Madame de Sévigné came to stay at the "Tour", and show hospitality to her Paris friends in that barbarous region. And now we were on a high level, driving along pretty wooded lanes, with here and there a country château or manor house, surrounded by orchards on either side of us. Towards one of these our driver pointed. It was low and gabled; I have seen a hundred such in England. "That is the old house of the De la Trémouilles," said he. And then we began to think of a daughter of that house who had been transplanted by marriage into England, and was known in English history and romance as Charlotte, the heroic Countess of Derby. By this time we had made great friends with our driver, by admiring his brisk little Breton pony, and asking him various questions about Breton cows. Suddenly he turned into a field-road on our left; and in three minutes we were in full sight of Les Rochers. We got down, and looked about us. We were on the narrow side of an oblong of fine delicate grass; on our right were peaked-roof farm buildings, granaries, barns, stables, and cow-houses; opposite to us, a thick wood, showing dark in the sunlight; in the corner to our left was the house, with *tourelles* and towers, and bits of high-roof, and small irregular doors; a much larger and grander building than I had expected; very like the larger castles in Scotland. Then quite on our right was the low wall, and ha-ha of the gardens, and the bridge over the ha-ha, and the richly-worked iron gates. We turned round; we were at the edge of the rising ground which fell rather abruptly from this point into a rich smiling plain—the Bocage country, in fact. We could see far away for miles and miles, till it all melted into the blue haze of distance.

Our driver took out his horse, and went to make friends with the farm-servants, who had turned out with lazy curiosity to look at the strangers. We sat down on the ground;



LES ROCHERS (MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ'S CHÂTEAU).

From a watercolour drawing by M. G.

the turf was fine and delicate, and the little flowerets interspersed were all of such kinds as tell of a lime-soil and of pure air. There were larks up above, right in the depth of the blue sky, singing as if they would crack their throats for joy; the sort of open farm-yard before us was full of busy, prosperous poultry of all kinds—hens clucking up their large broods of chickens, cocks triumphantly summoning their wives to the feast before the barn-door, fussy turkeys strutting and gobbling, and flocks of pigeons, now basking on the roof, now fluttering down to the ground. There were dogs baying in the unseen background, to add to the various noises. I never saw a place so suggestive of the ideas of peace and plenty. There were cows, too, tethered in the dusky shadows of the open cow-houses, with heaps of cut green food before them.

Our plan was to sketch first, and then to try to see the house. Now and then a servant in rather clumsy livery, or a maid in the country dress of Britanny, went across the space, to have a little talk with the farm-servants, and a side-long look at us. At last an old man in a blue blouse came out from the group near the barn door, and slowly approaching, sat himself down on a hillock near. Of course we began to talk, seeing his sociable intentions; and he told us he was a De la Roux, and had relations "in London." I fancied he might mean the De la Rues, but he corrected my mis-spelling with some indignation, and again asked me if I did not know his relations in London—the De la Roux. Ah yes! they were noble, he was noble; his ancestors had been as great as the ancestors of the Marquis yonder, but they had taken the wrong side in the wars; and here was he, their grandchild, obliged to work for his daily bread. We sighed out of sympathy with his sighs, and amplified the text, "*Sic transit*," &c. Then he offered us a pinch of snuff, which we took, and sneezed accordingly; and this afforded our old friend much amusement. To wind up this little story all at once—when we were going away, we demurred as to whether we could venture to offer a De la Roux a couple of francs, or

whether it would not seem like an insult to his noble blood. The wisdom of age carried the day against the romance of youth, and was justified in seeing the eager eyes in the worn sharp face watching the first initiatory sign of a forthcoming gift with trembling satisfaction. How pleasant the long quiet morning was! A cloud-shadow passing over us, a horse coming too near with its loud champing of the sweet herbage, our only disturbance; while before us the evident leisure for gossip, and signs of plenty to eat, filled up the idea of rural happiness. Then we went and saw the house, and the portraits, and passed out of the window into the garden—like all French gardens—with neglected grass, and stone-fountains, and cut yews and cypresses, and a profusion of lovely flowers, roses especially. We were all very sorry to come away.

Early this evening, Mary and Irene went out to sketch, and planted themselves down in a street already occupied by picturesque booths and open-air shops for pottery, men's clothes, and the really serviceable articles for country use. It seems it was the market-day at Vitré; and it was very pretty to watch the young housewives in their best attire, bargaining and hesitating over their purchases. Their dress was invariably a gown of some bright coloured cotton, a handkerchief of the same material, but a different colour, crossed over the breast *à la* Marie Antoinette, and a large apron, with a bib of a third hue almost covering the petticoat, and confining and defining the bust. They rung the changes on turkey-red, bright golden brown, and full dark blue. Indeed, the dark narrow streets, with their colonnades, black with the coming shadows, needed this relief of colour.

The little boys of Vitré, let loose from school, came clustering round about our sketchers. It was certainly a great temptation to the lads: but they came too close, and entirely obstructed the view, and only laughed, at first shyly, afterwards a little rudely, at my remonstrances. I applied to a *gendarme*, slowly coming down the street, but he only shrugged his shoulders with the hopeless beginning of "*Que*

voulez-vous, Madame! I am not here to impede the concourse of children," and passed on. Just at this moment a stout woman selling men's clothes in the open street close by, observed the dilemma, and came to the rescue. She wielded a pair of good strong fustian trousers, and scolded in right down earnest—and also in right-down good-humour, casting her weapon about her with considerable dexterity, so as to make it answer the purpose of a cat-o'-nine-tails. And thus she cleared a circle for us; and whenever she saw us too much crowded she came again; and the lads laughed, and we laughed, and we all ended capital friends. By-and-by she began to pack up her stock of clothes: she had a cart brought to her by her husband, and first she took down the poles of her booth, and then the awning, then the impromptu counter came to pieces, and lastly the coats and trousers, the blouses and jackets, were packed into great sacks. And she was on the point of departure—being, as we afterwards heard, a pedlaress who made the circuit of the markets in the district with her wares—when I thought that the only civility I could offer her was to show her the drawings that Mary and Irene had made, thanks to her well-timed interposition. She swore many a good round oath to enforce her admiration of the sketches, and called her little obedient husband to look at them; but, on his failing to recognise some object, she gave him a good cuff on the ear, apologising to us for his stupidity. I do not think he liked her a bit the less for this conduct.

May 4th.—We have decided to return to England to see the Exhibition. We are going by Fougères, Pont Orson, Mont St. Michel, Avranches, Caen, and Rouen; and by that time we shall have made an agreeable "loop" of a little journey full of objects of interest.

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February 16th, 1863.—Again in Paris! and, as I remember a young English girl saying with great delight, "we need never be an evening at home!" But her visions were of balls; our possibilities are the very pleasant ones of being

allowed to go in on certain evenings of the week to the houses of different friends, sure to find them at home ready to welcome any who may come in. Thus, on Mondays, Madame de Circourt receives; Tuesdays, Madame ——; Wednesdays, Madame de M——; Thursdays, Monsieur G——, and so on. There is no preparation of entertainment; a few more lights, perhaps a Baba, or cake savouring strongly of rum, and a little more tea is provided. Every one is welcome, and no one is expected. The visitors may come dressed just as they would be at home; or in full toilette, on their way to balls and other gaieties. They go without any formal farewell; whence, I suppose, our expression "French leave."

Of course the agreeableness of these informal receptions depends on many varying circumstances, and I doubt if they would answer in England. A certain talent is required in the hostess; and this talent is not kindness of heart, or courtesy, or wit, or cleverness, but that wonderful union of all these qualities, with a dash of intuition besides, which we call tact. Madame Récamier had it in perfection. Her wit or cleverness was of the passive or receptive order; she appreciated much, and originated little. But she had the sixth sense, which taught her when to speak, and when to be silent. She drew out other people's powers by her judicious interest in what they said; she came in with sweet words before the shadow of a coming discord was perceived. It could not have been all art; it certainly was not all nature. As I have said, invitations are not given for these evenings. Madame receives on Tuesdays. Any one may go. But there are temptations for special persons which can be skilfully thrown out. You may say in the hearing of one whom you wish to attract, "I expect M. Guizot will be with us on Tuesday; he is just come back to Paris,"—and the bait is pretty sure to take: and of course you can vary your fly with your fish. Yet, in spite of all experience and all chances, some houses are invariably dull. The people who would be dreary at home, go to be dreary

there. The gay, bright spirits are always elsewhere; or perhaps come in, make their bows to the hostess, glance round the room, and quietly vanish. I cannot make out why this is; but so it is.

But a delightful reception, which will never take place again—a more than charming hostess, whose virtues, which were the real source of her charms, have ere this "been planted in our Lord's garden"—awaited us to-night. In this one case I must be allowed to chronicle a name—that of Madame de Circourt—so well known, so fondly loved, and so deeply respected. Of her accomplished husband, still among us, I will for that reason say nothing, excepting that it was, to all appearances, the most happy and congenial marriage I have ever seen. Madame de Circourt was a Russian by birth, and possessed that gift for languages which is almost a national possession. This was the immediate means of her obtaining the strong regard and steady friendship of so many distinguished men and women of different countries. You will find her mentioned as a dear and valued friend in several memoirs of the great men of the time. I have heard an observant Englishman, well qualified to speak, say she was the cleverest woman he ever knew. And I have also heard one, who is a saint for goodness, speak of Madame de Circourt's piety and benevolence and tender kindness, as unequalled among any women she had ever known. I think it is Dekker who speaks of our Saviour as "the first true gentleman that ever lived." We may choose to be shocked at the freedom of expression used by the old dramatist: but is it not true? Is not Christianity the very core of the heart of all gracious courtesy? I am sure it was so with Madame de Circourt. There never was a house where the weak and dull and humble got such kind and unobtrusive attention, or felt so happy and at home. There never was a place that I heard of, where learning and genius and worth were more truly appreciated, and felt more sure of being understood. I have said that I will not speak of the living; but of course every one must perceive that

this state could not have existed without the realisation of the old epitaph—

> They were so one, it never could be said
> Which of them ruled, and which of them obeyed.
> There was between them but this one dispute,
> 'Twas which the other's will should execute.

In the prime of life, in the midst of her healthy relish for all social and intellectual pleasures, Madame de Circourt met with a terrible accident; her dress caught fire, she was fearfully burnt, lingered long and long on a sick-bed, and only arose from it with nerves and constitution shattered for life. Such a trial was enough, both mentally and physically, to cause that form of egotism which too often takes possession of chronic invalids, and which depresses not only their spirits, but the spirits of all who come near them. Madame de Circourt was none of these folks. Her sweet smile was perhaps a shade less bright; but it was quite as ready. She could not go about to serve those who needed her; but, unable to move without much assistance, she sat at her writing-table, thinking and working for others still. She could never again seek out the shy or the slow or the awkward; but, with a pretty beckoning movement of her hand, she could draw them near her, and make them happy with her gentle sensible words. She would no more be seen in gay brilliant society; but she had a very active sympathy with the young and the joyful who mingled in it; could plan their dresses for them; would take pains to obtain a supply of pleasant partners at a ball to which a young foreigner was going; and only two or three days before her unexpected death—for she had suffered patiently for so long that no one knew how near the end was—she took much pains to give a great pleasure to a young girl of whom she knew very little, but who, I trust, will never forget her.

I could not help interrupting the course of my diary to pay this tribute to Madame de Circourt's memory. At the end of February, 1863, many were startled with a sudden

pang of grief. "Have you heard? Madame de Circourt is dead!" "Dead!—why, we were at her house not a week ago!" "And I had a note from her only two days ago, about a poor woman," &c. And then the cry was "Oh, her poor husband! who has lived but for her, who has watched over her so constantly!"

We were at her house not a fortnight before, and met the pretty gay people all dressed out for a Carnival ball at the Russian Embassy. The whole thing looked unreal. They came and showed themselves in their brilliant costumes, exchanged a witticism or a compliment, and then flitted away to exhibit themselves elsewhere, and left the room to a few quiet, middle-aged, or quieter people. A lady was introduced to me, whose name I recognised, although I could not at the moment remember where I had heard it before. She looked, as she was, a French Marquise. I forget how much her dress was in full costume, but she had much the air of a picture of the date of Louis XV.

After she was gone, I recollected where I had heard the name. She was the present lady of Les Rochers, whose ancient manor-house we had visited in Britanny the year before. Instead of a Parisian drawing-room, full of scented air, brilliant with light, through which the gay company of high-born revellers had just passed, the bluff of land overlooking the Bocage rose before me; the short sweet turf on which we lay fragrant with delicate flowers; the grey-turretted manor-house, with here and there a faint yellow splash of colour on the lichen-tinted walls; the pigeons wheeling in the air above the high dove-cot; the country-servants in their loosely-fitting, much-belaced liveries; and old De la Roux in his blouse, shambling around us, with his horn snuff-box and story of ancestral grandeur. I told M. de Circourt of our visit to Britanny, and in return he gave me the following curious anecdote:—An uncle of his was the General commanding the Western district of France in or about 1816. He had a Montmorenci for his aide-de-camp; and on one of his tours of inspection the General and aide

were guests at Les Rochers. They were to have left their hospitable quarters the next day; but in the morning the General said to M. de Montmorenci that their host had pressed him to remain there another night, which he found, on inquiry, would be perfectly convenient for his plans, and therefore he had determined to accept the invitation. M. de Montmorenci, however, to the General's surprise, begged to be allowed to go and sleep at Vitré; and, on the General's inquiring what could be his reason for making such a request, he said that he had not been properly lodged; that the bedroom assigned to him was not one befitting a Montmorenci. "How so?" said the General. "Did they put you in a garret? Bachelors have often to put up with rough quarters when a house is full of visitors." "No, sir; I was on the ground-floor. My room was spacious and good enough; but it was that which had once belonged to Madame de Sévigné."

M. de Montmorenci after he had said this, looked as though he had given a full explanation; but the General was rather more perplexed than before.

"Well! and why should you object to sleeping in the room which once belonged to Madame Sévigné? From all accounts she was a very pretty, charming woman: and certainly she wrote delightful letters."

"Pardon me, sir; but it appears to me that you forget that Madame de Sévigné was a Jansenist, and that I am a Montmorenci, of the family of the first Baron of Christendom."

The young man was afraid of the contamination of heresy that might be lingering in the air of the room. There are old rooms in certain houses shut up since the days of the Great Plague, which are not to be opened for the world. I hope that certain Fellows' rooms in Balliol may be hermetically sealed, when their present occupants leave them, lest a worse thing than the plague may infect the place.

February 21*st*.—All this evening I have been listening to fragmentary recollections of the Reign of Terror, told us by

two ladies of high distinction. One of them said that her remembrances of that time would have a peculiar value, as she was then only a child of five or six years of age; and could not have attempted at that age to join her fragments together by any theory, however wild and improbable. She could simply recall what struck on her senses as extraordinary and unprecedented. I think the first thing she named was her indignation at seeing her mother assume a servant's dress, as she then thought. Evidently it had been considered advisable that Madame de —— should set aside all outward sign of superior rank or riches, and put on the clothes of what we should now call a "working-woman."

The next thing my friend remembered was the temporary absence of her father; who must have been arrested on suspicion, and, strange to say, in those days, released, but kept under strict surveillance. During his absence from home all the servants were dismissed, excepting the child's *bonne*. They lived in an apartment in the Place Vendôme, and there was grass in the centre of the *Place;* what we, in England, should call a "green," I should imagine. When her father returned home two men came with him. They were "citizens" told off to keep a watch upon M. de——'s movements. The little girl looked upon them as rude, vulgar men (she was a true little aristocrat, in fact), and wondered and chafed at her mother's trembling civility to these two fellows. They sat in the drawing-room, lolled in the best satin-cushioned chairs, smoked their pipes; and the dainty mother never upbraided them! It was very inexplicable. Madame cooked the family dinner; and probably did not do it remarkably well, even though she was a Frenchwoman. One day, one of the two citizen-guards, finding the idleness of his life in the drawing-room wearisome, or seized with a fit of good-nature, offered to turn cook. I think it was imagined he had been a cook somewhere under the old *régime*. And, after he had found for himself this congenial appointment, his fellow-guard offered to knit stockings for the family, and to sit in the *salle-à-manger*, through which

every one going in or out of the salon must pass. Either he or the cook left whatever they were about to accompany *Monsieur le Suspect* whenever he made any signs of wanting to go out. But altogether, and considering the office they held, they were not disobliging inmates, after the first jealousy of neglect was soothed.

Another circumstance which Madame de —— had observed was her mother's silence and depression of spirits at a particular hour. As sure as eleven o'clock drew near, the poor lady ceased talking to her little girl, and listened. Then by-and-by came a horrid heavy rumble in the distant streets; clearer and clearer it sounded, advancing slowly, then turning, and dying away into a sudden stop. This ominous noise was the more recognisable because of the general silence of Paris streets at that time. The carriage of the Prosecutor General, Fouquier-Tinville, was the only one that rolled about pretty much as it did in former years; any other was put down for fear lest it might be considered a mark of "aristocracy." But the diurnal heavy sound, at which the poor lady grew pale and crossed herself and prayed, was the *Charrette*, with its daily tale of forty or fifty victims, going to the Place Louis XV. From the Place Vendôme a sort of lane between two dead walls led down to the gardens of the Tuileries. These walls bounded the respective gardens of the convents of the Feuillants, and the Jacobins, which gave their names to the different political parties that met in the deserted buildings. Indeed, the iron gate leading into the Tuileries Gardens opposite to the end of the Rue Castiglione is still called the Porte des Feuillants. Along this dreary walled-in lane Madame de —— was taken by her *bonne* for a daily walk in the Palace Gardens. I asked her how it was that her parents, in sending their child for her exercise into these Gardens, did not dread the chance of her being shocked by the sights and sounds in the adjoining Place Louis XV. She replied that in those days there was a row of irregular, unshapely buildings at the further end of the Gardens, completely shutting out the *Place*.

Every one about the court who fancied that the erection of any edifice would add to his convenience ordered it to be built at the end of the Gardens, at the national expense; and thus there was a very sufficient screen between the Gardens and the *Place*. Besides, added her friend, Madame de St. A——, it was terrible to think how soon people are familiarised with horror; terrible in one sense—merciful in another; for elsewise how could persons have kept their senses in those days? She said that her husband, M. de St. A——, when a boy of ten or twelve, was only saved from being shut up with his parents and all the rest of his family in the Abbaye by the faithful courage of an old servant, who carried the little fellow off to his garret in the Faubourg St. Antoine. Of course this was done at the risk of the man's life, harbouring a suspected aristocrat being almost as criminal as being an aristocrat yourself. The little lad pined in the necessary confinement of his refuge; the close air, the difference of food, the anxiety about his father and mother, all told upon his health; and the man, his protector, seeing this, began to cast about him for some amusement and relaxation for the boy. So once a week he took the boy, well disguised, out for a walk. Where to, do you think? To the Place Louis XV., to see the guillotine at work on the forty or fifty victims! The delicate little boy shrank and sickened at the sight; yet tried to conquer all signs of his terror and loathing, partly out of regard to the man who had run so much risk in saving him, partly out of an instinctive consciousness that in those times of excitement, and among that impulsive race, his very friend and protector might have a sudden irritation against him, if he saw the boy's repugnance to the fearful exhibition, and might there and then denounce him as a little enemy to the public safety.

And again, and also to mark the apathy as to life, and the wild excitement which people took in witnessing the deadly terror and sufferings of others, Madame de St. A—— went on to say that her husband's family, to the number of

six, were imprisoned in the Abbaye, and made part of that strange sad company who lived there, and resigned themselves to their fate by keeping up that mockery of the society they had enjoyed in happier days: visiting each other, carrying on amusements and etiquette with dignity and composure; and, when the day's list of victims was read out by the gaoler, bidding farewell to those who still bided their time with quiet dignity and composure. One morning the gaoler's daughter, a bonny, good-tempered girl of fourteen or fifteen, who was a favourite with all that sad company, came instead of her father to read out the list of those for whom at that very minute the tumbril was waiting outside the gate. Every one of the six members of the St. A—— family were named. It was well; no one would remain in bitter solitude awaiting their day. One after another rose up, and bade the remaining company their solemn, quiet farewell, and followed the girl out of the door into the corridor, through another door, and then she stopped; she had not the key of the next. She turned round and laughed at those who were following her, with the glee of one who had performed a capital practical joke. "Have not you all been well taken in? Was it not a good trick? Look! it is only a blank sheet of paper. The list has not come yet. You may all go back again!" And their names, by some good fortune, were never placed on the lists; and the death of Robespierre set them free.

The conversation then turned upon the marvel it was now to think upon the immunity which Robespierre seemed to enjoy from all chances of assassination. There was no appearance of precaution in either his dress or his movements. His hours of going out and coming in were punctiliously regular; his methodical habits known to any one who cared to inquire. At a certain time of day he might be seen by crowds issuing forth from his house in the Rue St. Honoré, dressed with the utmost nicety, neither hurried in gait, nor casting any suspicious glances around him. His secretary, so said my friends, was alive not more than

twenty years ago; living in an apartment in the Quartier Latin, which he seldom left for any purpose. He had managed to avoid all public notice at the time of his master's death; and, long after most of those were dead who might have recognised him, the old man lived on in the seclusion of his rooms; maintaining to the few who cared to visit him his belief that Robespierre was a conscientious, if a mistaken, man. Then my friend Madame de —— took up the tale of her childish remembrances, and told us that the next thing she remembered clearly was her terror when one day, being at the window, she saw a wild mob come dancing and raging, shouting, laughing, and yelling into the Place Vendôme, with red nightcaps on their heads, their shirt-sleeves stripped up above the elbows, their hands and arms discoloured and red. Her mother, shuddering, drew the child away before she saw more; and the two cowered together in the farther corner of the room till the infernal din died away in the distance. The following summer, or so she thought it was—it was hot, bright weather at any rate—some order was given, or terrific hint whispered—she knew not which; but her parents and all the inhabitants of the houses in the *Place* had their tables spread in the open air, and took their meals *al fresco*, joined at pleasure by any of the Carmagnoles who chanced to be passing by, dressed much as those whom I have just mentioned as having so terrified the little girl and her mother. This enforced hospitality was considered a mark of good citizenship; and woe to those who shrank from such companionship at their board!

March 1*st*.—To-night, at home, the conversation turned upon English and French marriages. As several Frenchmen of note who had married English wives were present (and one especially, whose mother also was English, and who can use either tongue with equal eloquence), the discussion was based on tolerably correct knowledge. Most of those present objected strongly to the English way of bringing up the daughters of wealthy houses in all the luxurious habits of

their fathers' homes. Their riding-horses, their maids, their affluence of amusement; when, if the question of marriage arose—say to a young man of equal birth and education, but who had his way to make in the world—the father of the young lady could rarely pay any money down. It was even doubtful if he could make her an annual allowance; hardly ever one commensurate with the style in which she had been accustomed to live. In all probability a younger child's portion would be hers when her father died; when either the two lovers had given up all thoughts of uniting their fates, or when perhaps they no longer needed it, having had force of character enough to face poverty together, and had won their way upwards to competence. The tardy five or ten thousand pounds would have been invaluable once, that comes too late to many a one; so they said. They added that the luxurious habits of English girls, and the want of due provision for them on the part of their fathers, made both children and parents anxious and worldly in the matter of wedlock. The girls knew that, as soon as their fathers died, they must quit their splendid houses, and give up many of those habits and ways which had become necessary to them; and their parents knew this likewise; and hence the unwomanly search for rich husbands on the part of the mothers and daughters, which, as they declared, existed in England.

Now, said our French friends, look at a household in our country; in every rank it is the custom to begin to put by a marriage portion for a girl as soon as she is born. A father would think he was neglecting a duty, if he failed to do this, just as much as if he starved the little creature. Our girls are brought up simply; luxury and extravagance with us belong to the married women. When his daughter is eighteen or twenty, a good father begins to look about him, and inquire the characters of the different young men of his acquaintance. He observes them, or his wife does so still more efficiently; and, when they have settled that such a youth will suit their daughter, they name the portion they

can give their child to the young man's father or to some common friend. In reply, they are possibly informed that Monsieur Alphonse's education has cost so much; that he is now an *avocat* in a fair way to earn a considerable income, but at present unable to marry, unless the young lady can contribute her share, not merely her pin-money, but a *bonâ-fide* share, towards the joint expenses of housekeeping. Or he is a son of a man of property—property somewhat involved at present; but, could it be released from embarrassment by the payment of an immediate sum of money, his father would settle a certain present income upon the young people; and so on. My friends said that there was no doubt whatever that if, after these preliminary matters of business were arranged, either the young man or the girl did not entirely like each other on more intimate acquaintance, the proposed marriage would fall through in the majority of French families, and no undue influence would be employed to compel either party into what they disliked. But, in general, the girl has never been allowed to be on intimate terms with any one, till her parents' choice steps forward and is allowed by them to court her notice. And as for the young fellow, it has been easy for him to see enough of the young lady to know whether he can fancy her or not, before it comes to the point when it is necessary that he should take any individually active steps in the affair.

III

Paris, March 2nd, 1863.

Staying here in a French family, I get glimpses of life for which I am not prepared by any previous reading of French romances, or even by former visits to Paris, when I remained in an hotel frequented by English, and close to the street

which seems to belong almost exclusively to them. The prevalent English idea of French society is that it is very brilliant, thoughtless, and dissipated; that family life and domestic affections are almost unknown, and that the sense of religion is confined to mere formalities. Now I will give you two glimpses which I have had: one into the more serious side of Protestant, the other into the under-current of Roman Catholic life. The friend with whom I am staying belongs to a *Dizaine*, that is to say, she is one of ten Protestant ladies, who group themselves into this number in order to meet together at regular intervals of time, and bring before each other's consideration any cases of distress they may have met with. There are numbers of these *Dizaines* in Paris; and now as to what I saw of the working of this plan. One of their principles is to give as little money as possible in the shape of "raw material," but to husband their resources, so as to provide employment by small outlays of capital in such cases as they find on inquiry to prove deserving. Thus women of very moderate incomes find it perfectly agreeable to belong to the same *Dizaine* as the richest lady in the Faubourg St. Germain. But what all are expected to render is personal service of some kind; and in these services people of various degrees of health and strength can join: the invalid who cannot walk far, or even she who is principally confined to the sofa, can think and plan and write letters; the strong can walk, and use bodily exertion. They try to raise the condition of one or two families at a time—to raise their condition into self-supporting independence.

For instance, the *Dizaine* I am acquainted with had brought before their notice the case of a sick shoemaker, and found him, upon inquiry, living in a room on the fifth floor of one of those high, dark, unclean houses which lie behind the eastern end of the Rue Jacob. Up the noisome, filthy staircase,—badly-lighted and frequented by most disreputable people—to the close, squalid room in which the man lay bed-ridden, did the visitors from the *Dizaine* toil.

He was irritable and savage. I think the English poor are generally depressed and sullen under starvation and neglect; but the French are too apt to become fierce even to those who would fain help them; or it might be illness in the case of this man. His wife was a poor patient creature, whose spirit and intelligence seemed pressed out of her by extreme sorrow, and who had neither strength of mind nor body to enable her to make more of an effort than to let one of the *Dizaine* know of the case. There were children, too, scrofulous from bad air and poor living. The medical men say, that the diseases arising from this insidious taint are much more common in Paris than in London.

Well, this case was grave matter of consideration for the *Dizaine;* and the end of the deliberation was this:—One lady undertook to go and seek out a lodging in the same quarter as that in which the shoemaker lived at present, but with more air, more light, and a cleaner, sweeter approach. It was a bad neighbourhood, but it was that in which the family had taken root; and it would have occasioned too great a wrench from all their previous habits and few precious affections, to pull them up by force, and transplant them to an entirely different soil. Another lady undertook to seek out among her acquaintance for a subscriber to a certain sea-bathing charity at Dieppe, who could give an order to the poor little boy who was the worst victim to scrofula. An invalid said that, while awaiting this order, she would see that some old clothes of her own prosperous child should be altered and arranged, so that the little cripple should go to Dieppe decently provided. Some one knew a leather merchant, and spoke of getting a small stock of leather at wholesale prices; while all these ladies declared they would give some employment to the shoemaker himself; and I know that they—great ladies as one or two of them were—toiled up the noisome staircase, and put their delicate little feet up on to the bed where he lay, in order to give him the cheerful comfort of employment again. I suppose this was disturbing the regular course of labour; but I do not fancy

that cases of this kind are so common as to affect greatly the more prosperous tradespeople. The last I heard of this shoemaker was, that he was in a (comparatively) healthy lodging; his wife more cheerful, he himself slightly sarcastic instead of positively fierce, and, though still bed-ridden, managing to earn a tolerable livelihood by making shoes to be sold ready-made in the American market; a piece of permanent employment procured for him through the instrumentality of the *Dizaine*.

Of course these ladies, being human, have their foibles and faults. Their meetings are apt to become gossipy, and they require the firm handling of some superior woman to keep them to the subject and business in hand. Occasional bickerings as to the best way of managing a case, or as to the case most deserving of immediate assistance, will occur; and may be blamed or ridiculed by those who choose rather to see blemishes in execution than to feel righteousness of design. The worst that can be said is, that *Dizaines* (like all ladies' committees I ever knew) are the better for having one or two men amongst them. And some of them at least are most happy and fortunate in being able to refer for counsel and advice to M. Jules Simon, whose deep study of the condition of the workwoman (*l'ouvrière*) in France, and the best remedies to be applied to her besetting evils—whose general, wise, and loving knowledge of the life of the labouring classes—empower him to judge wisely on the various cases submitted to him.

Now as to my glimpse into Roman Catholic wisdom and goodness in Paris. Not long ago—it is probably still going on—there was a regular service held in the crypt under St. Sulpice for very poor workmen, immediately after the grand (high) mass. It was almost what we should call a "ragged church." They listened to no regular sermon on abstract virtues; but among them stood the priest, with his crucifix, speaking to them in their own homely daily language—speaking of brotherly love, of self-sacrifice, like that of which he held the symbol in his hands—of the temptations to

which they were exposed in their various trades and daily lives, using even the technical words, so that every man felt as if his own individual soul was being entreated. And by-and-by there was a *quête* for those still poorer, still more helpless and desolate than themselves; many of them of course could not give even the sous, or the five-centime piece. But after that the priest went round, speaking low and softly to each individual, and asking each what effort, what sacrifice he could make "in the name of the Lord." One said, he could sit up with a sick neighbour who needed watching in the night; another offered a day's wages for the keep of the family of the incapacitated man; the priest suggested to a third that he and his wife might take one of the noisy little children to play among their own children for the day; another offered to carry out the weekly burden of a poor widow. One could not hear all; it was better that such words should be spoken low; that the left hand should not know what the right hand did. But the priests seemed always ready with little suggestions which nothing but an intimate acquaintance with the lives of these poor men could have enabled them to give.

We are talking of leaving Paris, and going leisurely on to Rome. M. de Montalembert was here last night, and wrote me down a little *détour* which he said we could easily make, rejoining the railroad at Dijon.

March 5th. Avignon.—After all we were not able to follow out M. de Montalembert's instructions, but I shall keep his paper (written in English), as the places he desired us to visit sound full of interest, and would make a very pleasant week's excursion from Paris at some future time.

"Provide yourself with Ed. Joanne's *Guide du Voyageur. Est-et-Mur.*

"By the Lyons railway to Auxerre (a beautiful city with splendid churches).

"At Auxerre take the diligence (very bad) to Avallon, a very pretty place with fine churches. At Avallon hire a vehicle of some sort to Vezelay, only three leagues off; the

most splendid Romanesque church in Europe; and to Chastellux, a fine old castle belonging to the family of that name, from the Crusade of 1147. Returning to Avallon, there is a very bad coach to Sémur, another very pretty place, with a delightful church; seven or eight leagues off. From Sémur by omnibus to Montbard, or Les Launes, which are both railroad stations. Stop at Dijon, a most interesting city, and be sure you see the museum."

When M. de Montalembert wrote out his little plan, I said something about the name "Avallon," "the Isle of Avallon" being in France, instead of Bretagne; but he reminded me of the fact that the fragments of the Arthurian romances were to be found in one shape or another all over the west of Europe, and claimed Avallon as *the* place

> Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
> Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
> Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns,
> And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea.

He said that there is also a Morvan, a Forêt de Morvan, in the same district. Speaking of the Crusades (àpropos of the family of de Chastellux, alluded to in the sketch of a possible journey which he had drawn out for us), the company present fell to talking about the rapid disappearance of old French families within the last twenty or thirty years; during which time the value for "long pedigrees" has greatly increased after the fifty years of comparative indifference in which they were held. The five *Salles des Croisades*, at Versailles were appropriated to the commemoration of the events from which they take their names, by Louis-Philippe, in 1837; previously to which the right of the hundred and ninety-three families that claim to be directly descended from the Crusaders who went on the three first Crusades (from 1106 to 1191 A.D.) was thoroughly examined into, and scrutinized by heralds and *savants* and lawyers acquainted with the difficulty of establishing descent, before the proud hundred and ninety-three could have their arms emblazoned in the first *Salles des Croisades*. Among them

rank de Chastellux, de Biron, de Lamballe, de Guérin (any ancestor of Eugénie de Guérin, I wonder?) de la Guéche, de Rohan, de La Rochefoucauld, de Montalembert, &c. And now in 1864 not two-thirds of these families exist in the direct male line! Yet such has become the value affixed to these old historical titles and names, that they are claimed by collateral relations, by descendants in the female line—nay, even by the purchasers of the lands from which the old Crusaders derived the appellations; and it has even become necessary to have an authorised court to judge of the rights of those who assume new titles and designations. The Montmorencis, indeed, to this day hold a kind of "parliament" of their own, and pluck off the plumage of any jay who dares to assume their name and armorial bearings. There is apparently no power of becoming a "Norfolk Howard" at will in France. They spoke as if our English nobility was a very modern race in comparison with the French; but assigned the palm of antiquity to the great old Belgian families, even in preference to the Austrians, so vain of their many quarterings.

We could not manage to go by Avallon and Dijon, and so we came straight on here, and are spending a few days in this charming inn; the *mistral* howling and whistling without, till we get the idea that the great leafless acacia close to the windows of our *salon* has been convulsed into its present twisted form by the agony it must have suffered in its youth from the cruel sharpness of this wind. But, inside, we are in a lofty *salon*, looking into the picturesque inn yard, sheltered by a folding screen from the knife-like draught of the door; a fire heaped up with blazing logs, resting on brass andirons; skins of wild beasts making the floor soft and warm for our feet; old military plans, and bird's-eye views of Avignon, as it was two hundred years ago, hanging upon the walls, which are covered with an Indian paper; *Eugénie de Guérin* to read; and we do not care for the *mistral*, and are well content to be in our present quarters for a few days.

March 8th.—It was all very well to huddle ourselves up in in-doors comfort for a day or two; but, after that, we longed to go out in spite of the terrible *mistral*. We certainly found Avignon "*cum vento fastidioso;*" and began to wish that we had delayed our progress by stopping at Avallon, if that indeed was the place "where never wind blows loudly." So on the day but one after our arrival here, we happed and wrapped ourselves up tightly and well, and sailed out of the court-yard. We were taken and seized in a moment by the tyrant; all we could do was to shut our eyes, and keep our ground, and wonder where our petticoats were. Going across the bridge was impossible; even the passers-by warned us against the attempt; but, after we had caught our breath again, we turned and went slowly up the narrow streets, choosing those that offered us the most shelter, until we had reached the wide space in front of the Palace of the Popes. With slow perseverance we made our way from point to point, and at length came to a corner in the massive walls where we could rest and look about us. Up above our heads rose the enormous walls—the far-extending shadow of Rome; for never did the French build such a mighty structure; it seemed like a growth of the solid rock itself. The prettiness of the garden round the base of the Palace looked to us mean and out of place, with its tidy flower-beds and low shrubs. All entrance to the Palace was forbidden; it is now a prison.

We went into the cathedral, and the calm atmosphere was so soothing and delightful, that we were inclined to stop there till the mistral had ceased blowing; but, as that might not be for a month or six weeks, on second thoughts we believed it would be better to return to our hotel. We stood for a few minutes on the cathedral-steps, looking at the magnificent view before us, and only regretting the clouds of fine dust, which from time to time were whirled over the landscape. Close to us rose the colossal walls of the Palace; before us, in the centre of the open space, there was a bronze statue of a man dressed in Eastern robes; and

we asked whom it represented—what saint? what martyr? It was that of the Persian Jean Althen, the Persian who first introduced the culture of madder into the South of France. His father had held high office under Thomas Koulikhan, but was involved in the fall of his master, and his son fled for protection to the French Consul of Smyrna. It was forbidden under penalty of death to carry the seed of the madder-plant out of the district; but Althen managed to bring some of it to Marseilles, and thus originated the cultivation of madder in le Comtat; the profits of which to the inhabitants may be imagined from the fact that the revenue from this source in one department alone (Vaucluse) amounts annually to more than fifteen millions of francs. Althen and his daughter died in poverty; but of late years the statue which we saw in the Place Rocher des Doms, has been erected to the Persian unbeliever, right opposite to the cathedral and the Palace of the Popes—where once John XXII. (that most infamous believer) lived. I had often seen madder in England, in the shape of a dirty brown powder—the roots ground down; it has a sweetish taste, and the workmen in calico print-works will not unfrequently take a little in their hands as they pass the large bales, and put it into their mouths. I had heard a young English philanthropist say that he had often entertained thoughts of buying a tract of land in Eastern Italy, and introducing the cultivation of madder there, as a means of raising the condition of the people; but I had never heard of Jean Althen before, and, tempestuous as it was, I made my way up to the statue, so that I could look up at the calm, sad face of the poor Persian. I suppose the newly discovered Aniline dyes may uproot the commerce he established, at some future period; but he did a good work in his day, of which no man knew the value while he lived. Our kind landlady at the Hôtel de l'Europe was at the hall-door to greet us on our return, and warned us with some anxiety against going out in the *mistral;* we were not acclimatised, she said; the English families resident in Avignon did not suffer, because they had

been there so long. Of course we asked questions as to these English families, and heard that some had resided in the city for two or three generations; all engaged in the *commerce de la garance;* so they too had cause to bless the memory of Jean Althen.

March 12*th.*—I suppose our landlady thought she would keep us prudent and patient indoors, until we receive the telegram from Marseilles announcing that it is safe for the boats to Civita Vecchia to start—hitherto they have been delayed by this horrid *mistral*—for she has brought us in a good number of books, most of them topographical, but one or two relating to the legends or history of the district. We are very content to be in the house to-day; the wind is blowing worse than ever; Irene has a bad pain in her side, which we suppose must be a local complaint; for, after trying to cure it by mustard plaisters, she sent our maid out at last to get a blister of a particular size, but without naming what part required the application; and the druggist immediately said, "Ah, for the side! it will last while the *mistral* lasts; or till she leaves Avignon!" We are learning how to manage wood-fires; the man who waits upon us, and is chambermaid as well as footman, gave us a little lesson yesterday. Always rake the living ashes to the front, and lay on the fresh wood behind; those are his directions, and hitherto they have answered well. This old man is a Pole, and came, an exile, to be a servant in the hotel about thirty years ago. He likes talking to us; but his language is very difficult to understand, though we can quite make out the soft, satiny patois of the South of France, the Provençal dialect, in which our questions are answered in the streets.

To-night he has brought in our lamp and cleared away our *thé simple.* Mary is sitting by the fire, tempted sorely by the wood logs; for every stroke of the sharp, thin poker brings out springing fountains of lovely sparkles. I, having a frugal mind, exclaim at her; for we pay heavily for our basketful of wood; but she, in a pleading, coaxing way, calls my attention to the brilliant effect of her work, and I

cannot help watching the bright little lives which one by one vanish, till at length a poor solitary spark runs about vainly to find its companions, and then dies out itself. It reminds me of a story I heard long ago in Ramsay, in the Isle of Man;—and here I think of it at Avignon! We were questioning a fisherman's wife at Ramsay about the Manthe Doog of Peel Castle, in which she had a firm belief; and from this talk we passed on to fairies. "Are there any in the island now?" I asked, gravely, of course, for it was a grave and serious subject with her. "None now; none now," she replied. "My brother saw the last that ever was in the island. He was making a short cut in the hills above Kirk Maughold, and came down on a green hollow, such as there are on the hill-tops, just green all round, and the blue sky above, and as still as still can be, but for the larks. He heard the larks singing up above; but this time he heard a little piping cry out of the ground; so he looked about him everywhere, and followed the sound of the cry; and at length he came to a dip in the grass, and there lay a fairy ever so weak and small, crying sadly. 'Oh!' she said, when she saw him, 'you are none of my own people; I thought perhaps they had come back for me: but they've left me here alone, and all gone away, and I am faint and weak, and could not go with them;' and she began to cry again. So he meant it well, and he thought he'd carry her home to be a plaything to his children; it would have been better than lying there playing alone in the damp grass: so he tried to catch her; but somehow—he had big hands, had my brother, and an awkward horny way of holding things; and fairies is as tickle to handle as butterflies; and when he had caught her, and she lay very still, he thought he might open his hand after a time, and tell her he was doing it all for her good; but she was just crushed to death, poor thing! So, as he said, there was no use bringing her home in that state; and he threw her away; and that was the end of the last fairy I ever heard of in the island." The last sparks in the wooden logs at Avignon were my last fairies.

Among our hostess's books was the authorised report of the trial for the murder of Madame la Marquise de Gange. It is so interesting, and has so strong a local flavour, that we are determined, blow high, blow low, to go over to Ville-Neuve to-morrow, and see her portrait by Mignard in the Eglise de l'Hôpital at Ville-Neuve. She lived in the seventeenth century, and was the daughter of a certain Sieur de Rossau, a gentleman of Avignon, who had married an heiress, the daughter of Joanis Sieur de Nochères. Her father died when she was very young; and she and her mother went to live with the Sieur de Nochères, probably in one of the large gloomy houses in the narrow old streets we have passed through to-day, with no windows on the lower floor, only strongly-barred gratings; they are almost like fortified dwellings—which, indeed, the state of affairs at the time they were built required them to be. The little girl promised to be a great beauty, and had besides a dowry of 500,000 livres; and it was no great wonder that all the well-born young men of Provence (and some who were not young, too), came a-wooing to the grand-daughter of the rich old burgess of Avignon. But where force was so often employed as a method of courtship, and at a time when obstacles to success (in the way of fathers or mothers or obstinate relations) were so easily got rid of by determined suitors, it was thought better to arrange an early marriage for the little girl, who was called Mademoiselle de Châteaublanc, after one of the estates of her grandfather; and, accordingly, she was espoused in 1649, at the age of thirteen, by the Marquis de Castellane, grandson of the Duc de Villars. Her husband is described as being as charming as his bride. He was handsome and sweet-tempered, besides being a scion of a great French house. He took his lovely little bride to Paris, where she was the admired of all beholders at the court of the young King Louis XIV. His boyish majesty was struck with her rare beauty, and conferred on her the honour of dancing with her in a court ballet; and the docile courtiers followed his lead, and christened her "*La belle Provençale*," by which

name she was thereafter better known than by her legitimate title of Marquise de Castellane.

When first she came to town
They ca'ed her Jess MacFarlane,
But, now she's come and gone,
They ca' her The Wandering Darling.

Poor young Belle Provençale! admired by the King of France and all his men; living a bright, happy life of innocent pleasure in Paris; with a charming husband, by whom she was passionately beloved, and whose affection she fondly esteemed; rich, lovely, and of high rank—how little she could have anticipated her rapid descent from the pinnacle of good fortune! Her first deep grief was the loss of her husband. He was drowned off the coast of Sicily; and she came back from the gay life of Paris to mourn him deeply in the austere home of her grandfather, in the city of Avignon. The only change she sought for in these years of mourning was to go into retreat in the convent at Ville-Neuve—the village we saw on the opposite side of the Rhone, the other day, when we stood on the cathedral steps. The account of her sorrow and regret at the death of her young husband is evidently so truthful and sincere that one almost wonders at her marrying again; but I suppose in those days a bourgeois grandfather and a widowed mother were considered but poor protectors for a beautiful young woman of great wealth.

At any rate, I read of her having, at length, selected from among many suitors the Sieur de Lanide, Marquis de Gange, Baron du Languedoc, Gouverneur de St. André, to be her second husband. She was married to him in 1658, when he was twenty, and she twenty-two years of age. He was as beautiful as she was, but of a violent and ferocious character. For the first few months after their marriage he appeared to be devoted to her; but, by-and-by, he grew both weary of her society and suspiciously jealous of all her former friends. It was rather a lonely life now for the poor lady, shut up in her husband's Château de Gange, while

he went about enjoying himself in provincial society, and occasionally visiting Paris, where once she had been so sought after and cherished. Still there is no account of her ever having repined at this seclusion; of course, the official reports of events begin at a much later period. Things went on in this way between the husband and wife for some time without any change. Then two of his brothers, the Abbé and the Chevalier de Gange, came to live at the Château de Gange; and a short time afterwards her old grandfather the Sieur de Nochères died, leaving Madame de Gange his heiress. The Marquis, her husband, was much occupied in looking after the various estates to which his wife had succeeded under her grandfather's will. Gange is seven leagues from Montpellier, and nineteen from Avignon, in a lonely, wild district; the château was the principal house in a small village, the inhabitants of which were dependants of the Marquis. But, for some little time after the Sieur de Nochères' death, it was necessary for his heiress to be in Avignon; and, whether it was, as the rumour went at the time, that she had reason to suspect that a cream which, one day at her mother's table, her husband pressed her much to eat was poisoned with arsenic, or whether she remembered the horoscope drawn for her in Paris which predicted that she should die a violent death, or whether, as is most likely, her seven or eight years' knowledge of her husband's character made her fearful and suspicious, it is certain that before leaving Avignon at this time, she made a singular will, which was attested with all possible legal forms, to this effect. Her mother was to be her sole heir, with power to leave all the property after her death to either of the children which Madame de Gange had had by her second husband; the boy was six, the girl five years old at this time, and they were living with their grandmother at Avignon. Although this will was executed in secret, she made a solemn declaration before the magistrates of Avignon to the effect that, though she might be compelled to make a subsequent will, this and this alone was valid.

Poor lady! she had but too much reason to dread the time when she would be obliged to return to the lonely château, far away from her friends, in the power of a cruel and negligent husband, who hungered after the uncontrolled and unincumbered possession of her fortune, and who might leave her again, as he had done before, exposed to the profligate and insolent solicitations of the Abbé, the cleverest of the three brothers, who had already traded on her misery at her husband's neglect and ill-concealed dislike of her, by saying that, if his sister-in-law would accede to his wishes, he would bring her back her husband's affection. The Chevalier seems to have been a brutal fool, under the influence of his clever brother, the Abbé. In the interval between her grandfather's death and her return to the Château de Gange, these three brothers veiled their designs under an appearance of the greatest complaisance to Madame de Gange. But all their seeming attention and consideration, all her husband's words and acts of lover-like devotion, ended in this question—How soon would she go back to the Château de Gange? Avignon was unhealthy in hot weather, while the autumn, the vintage-season, was exquisite at the château. At length, wearied out with their urgency, and dreading the consequences of too persistent a refusal, she left Avignon for La Gange. But, first, she gave the sum of twenty pistoles to different convents, to say masses for her soul, in case of her dying suddenly without extreme unction. It gives one an awful idea of the state of society in those days (reign of Charles II. in England), to think of this helpless young woman, possessed by a too well-founded dread, yet not knowing of any power to which she could appeal for protection, and obliged to leave the poor safety of a city to go to a lonely house, where those who wished her evil would be able to work their will.

At the Château de Gange she found the two brothers-in-law, who had returned from Avignon a few days previously, and her mother-in-law, a good, kind woman, to whose presence one fancies the young Marquise must have clung.

But the Dowager Marquise habitually lived at Montpellier, and she returned there soon after the Marquise's arrival. While the old lady had remained in the château, all had gone on well; but on her departure the Marquis set off back to Avignon, leaving instructions to his brothers to coax his wife into making another will. They performed their work skilfully; they told her there could be no perfect reconciliation with her husband, until she had shown full confidence in him by bequeathing him all her property in case of her death. For the sake of peace, and remembering her secret testament at Avignon, she agreed to their wishes; and a will, leaving all her property unconditionally to her husband, was made at the Château de Gange. It was short-sighted of the poor lady, if she valued her life. They at any rate did not value it; and now, the sooner they got rid of her the better. So much is stated in the report of the trial on authority, which seems to have satisfied the judges at the time. For the further events, there is the direct testimony of the Marquise on her death-bed and of other witnesses; and there are curious glimpses of the manners of the period, as well as of the state of society.

The *dramatis personæ* were disposed of as follows, on the 17th of May, 1667:—The mother of these three wicked sons —the Marquis, the Abbé, and the Chevalier de Gange—was at her house in Montpellier; the Marquis himself was tarrying in the neighbourhood of Avignon, ostensibly employed in looking after the estates of his wife; she was at the château in the lonely village, keeping up the farce of friendly politeness with her brothers-in-law, whom she dreaded inexpressibly. There was a chaplain in the house, who was their tool, as she well knew; and a few neighbours from the village came to see her from time to time, the wives of the *Intendant* and of the Huguenot minister; worthy and kind-hearted women, as will be proved, though not of the class of society to which she had been accustomed in the happy days in Paris. On the 17th of May, she required some medicine, and sent for a draught to the village doctor.

When it came, it was so black and nasty that she took some physic which she had ready in her chamber instead, and threw the draught away. A pig which licked up the draught died that same day. She was not well, and stopped in bed for the whole morning; but in the afternoon, finding it rather dull, she sent for two or three of the good women of the neighbourhood to come and keep her company, and ordered a collation to be served to her friends in her bedroom. Her indisposition, whatever it was, does not seem to have affected her appetite; for she deposed that she ate a great deal, and to that fact she attributes her safety from one way of attacking her life.

The Abbé and the Chevalier, hearing of their sister-in-law's party, and the entertainment that was going on, came into the chamber uninvited, and made themselves very agreeable. By-and-by, the neighbours went away; it was still early in the afternoon; and the Abbé and Chevalier accompanied the good ladies to the great hall, and Madame was left alone in bed. Presently back came the Abbé, with a terrible face; he brought a pistol, a sword, and a cup of poison—a greater choice of deaths than that offered to Fair Rosamond; but, all the same, the Marquise must die by either fire, steel, or poison. With quick presence of mind she chose to drink the latter; and after doing so, she turned round as in writhing agony, and spat out the contents of her mouth into the pillow. Her skin was blackened by the burning drops that fell upon it, and her mouth was horribly burnt; and no wonder, for the deposition says that the drink was made of arsenic and corrosive sublimate, mixed up in aqua-fortis. There was evidently no idea of doing things by halves in those days! She left the thick part of the liquid in the bottom of the glass; but the Chevalier, who by this time had come up to see if he could render himself useful in the business, stirred up the sediment and made her drink it. Then she begged hard to have a priest to shrive her soul; and, as they felt pretty secure that no help could now avail her, they went away, and sent the household chaplain, *le*

Prêtre Perrette, who was also *curé* of the village, to give her what spiritual aid he could. He had lived in the de Gange family for five-and-twenty years, and was ready to connive at any wickedness which they might plan.

Now, while they went to find this worthy chaplain, the poor lady was left alone in her bed-chamber, and looked about for means of escape. There was none, except jumping from the window into the great enclosed court-yard, twenty feet below, and all paved with flags; but that risk was better than remaining where she was; so she took courage, and was on the point of throwing herself out, when Perrette, the chaplain, came in with the viaticum. He ran to the window, and tried to pluck her back; but the petticoat which he caught hold of gave way, and only a fragment of it remained in his hand. She was down below, pushing her long black hair down her throat, and thus, with wonderful presence of mind, trying to make herself sick; in which attempt she succeeded. Then she went round the court-yard, trying all the doors with trembling haste: but they were all locked; and that wicked chaplain in the château above was hastening to find the relentless brothers-in-law and to tell them of her escape. She ran round and round the enclosure, beating and striving at the doors; and at length a groom came out of the stables which were at one end of the yard, whom she implored to let her out by the stable-door into the street or road; saying she had swallowed some poison by mistake, and must find an antidote without loss of time.

When she was once out of the accursed premises, she went to the house of the Sieur des Prats, who lived in the village. He was absent; but many of the good women of the place were assembled there on a visit to his wife. We may judge of the rank of the company by the fact that, in the depositions, all the married women are called "*Mademoiselle*," *e.g.*, "Mademoiselle Brunel, wife of the Huguenot minister," &c.; and in the *Traité sur la manière d'Ecrire des Lettres*, par Grimarest, 1667, the rules for the addresses to letters are these:—If a letter is to a lady of quality, she is

to be called "*Madame*" in the address, and the letter is to be tied up with silk, and sealed with three seals; if the correspondent is only *la femme d'un gentilhome*, her titles on the superscription must be "*Mademoiselle Mademoiselle*," so and so; but if she is merely the wife of a bourgeois, simple "*Mademoiselle*" is all that is to be accorded to her.

Now all the ladies assembled at the Sieur des Prats were Mademoiselles; but they were brave women, as we shall see. In amongst this peaceful company, enjoying an afternoon's gossip, burst the lady of the Château de Gange; her dress (that which she had worn in bed) torn and disordered; her hair hanging about her; her face in all probability livid with mortal terror and the effects of the fierce poison. She had hardly had time to give any explanation of her appearance, when the Chevalier de Gange rushed into the room in search of his half-killed victim; the Abbé remained below, guarding the door of the house. The Chevalier walked up and down the room, saying that Madame was mad; that she must return with him, and uttering angry menaces. While his back was turned, Mademoiselle Brunel, wife of the Huguenot minister of the village, gave Madame de Gange small pieces of orvietan out of a box which she carried in her pocket. Orvietan, be it remembered, was considered a sovereign remedy against all kinds of poisons; and the fact of the minister's wife carrying this antidote about in her pocket, wherever she went, tells a good deal as to the insecurity of life at that period. Madame de Gange managed to swallow a number of pieces of orvietan, unperceived by the Chevalier; but when one of the ladies, pitying her burning thirst, went and brought her a glass of water, he perceived the kindness, and broke out afresh, dashing the glass from Madame's mouth, and bidding all present to leave the room instantly, as he did not like witnesses to his sister-in-law's madness. He drove them out, indeed, but they only went as far as the next room, where they huddled together in affright, wondering what they could do for the poor lady. She, meanwhile, begged for mercy in the most touching

manner; she promised that she would forgive all, if he would but spare her life: but at these words he ran at her with his sword; holding it short, so that it could serve him as a dagger and give the surer stabs. She ran to the door, and clung to it, crying out afresh for pity, for mercy, for help. He stabbed her five times before his weapon broke in her shoulder.

Then the ladies burst in to the assistance of Madame, who was lying on the floor bathed in blood. Some ran to her help; others called through the window to the passers-by to fetch the surgeon quickly. Hearing their cry through the window, the Abbé came up; and, finding his sister-in-law not yet dead, he began to hit her with the butt-end of his pistol, till brave Mademoiselle Brunel caught hold of his arm, and hung all her weight upon it. He struck her over and over again, to make her let go; but she would not; and all the women flew upon him "like lionesses," and dragged him by main force out of the house, and turned him into the village-street. One of the ladies, who was skilled in surgery, returned to the room where Madame de Gange lay; and at her desire she put her knee against the wounded shoulder of Madame, and pulled out the broken point of the sword by main force. Then she staunched the blood, and bound up the wounds. The Chevalier had been in too blind a passion, apparently, to think of stabbing any vital part; and, in spite of poison, and the heavy fall on the paved court-yard, and the five stabs, there seemed yet a chance for Madame de Gange's life. That long and terrible May afternoon was now drawing to a close; and the Abbé and the Chevalier thought it well to take advantage of the coming darkness to ride off to Auberas, an estate of their brother's, about a league from La Gange. There they quarrelled with each other, because their work was left incomplete, and were on the point of fighting, when it seems as if they thought it better to take again to flight. After the steed was stolen, every one bethought him of locking the stable door. The "consuls", as the magistrates

of the district were called, came to offer their services to Madame de Gange, who was lying between life and death. The neighbouring barons paid her visits of condolence; one of them was practical enough to think of securing the assassins; but two or three days had then elapsed, and the Abbé and Chevalier had embarked at Ogde, a small port on the Mediterranean.

Her husband, the Marquis, took the affair very coolly. He heard of it at Avignon one morning; but he did not mention it to any friends whom he met in the street, nor did he set off to see his wife till the afternoon of the following day. But he had the will, which his wife had been compelled to make at La Gange, safe with him at Avignon; and before he left the city, he went to see the Vice-Legate, with a view to this document, by which his wife bequeathed him all in case of her death. The Vice-Legate refused to recognise it, and then first informed him of the will by which Madame de Gange had left her property to her mother, and which rendered null any testament made after that date. The Marquis was not induced by this information to be more tender towards his poor wounded wife. He found her lying at the house of the Sieur des Prats, in the most dangerous state. At first she reproached him a little for leaving her at the mercy of his brothers; but almost directly she begged his pardon for what she had said, and was most tender and sweet in her conversation with him. He thought he could take advantage of her gentle frame of mind, and urged her to revoke her declaration about the perpetual legality of the Avignon will; but his pertinacity on this point at such a time opened her eyes, and henceforward she had no hope of touching his stony heart. Her mother, Madame de Ropace, came to see her; but she was so disgusted at seeing the Marquis's pretended affection and assumption of watchful care over his wife, that she left at the close of three days. It was evident now to all that the end was drawing near; the wounds did not touch life, but enough of the poison had been swallowed to destroy any constitution.

Madame de Gange begged to have the extreme unction administered; but the monks in attendance said that, before that could be done, she must forgive all her enemies. She was too gentle to harbour revenge; but when Perrette, the chaplain, and the accomplice of her assassins, came in his sacred vestments to administer the last sacrament, it did cost her a severe struggle to receive the wafer from his hands. But she forgave him, too, as completely as the rest; and, fearing that her little son might at some future time think it his duty to avenge her death, she sent for him, and tried to make him understand the Christian duty of forgiveness. Meanwhile, the report of her assassination had spread far and wide, and the Parliament of Toulouse despatched Monsieur de Catelan to La Gange to take her evidence as that of a dying woman. When he first came, she was in a state of stupor; but the next day she rallied and saw him alone. A fresh terror had seized upon her, and she believed herself not safe at La Gange, and entreated him to take her to Montpellier; but it was too late then, and in the afternoon she died, nineteen days after the attack upon her life.

Monsieur de Gange now became alarmed, and pretended to be in the deepest distress, and that his grief could only be alleviated by the discovery and punishment of the murderers of his dear wife. But the unmoved M. de Catelan arrested him, and took the charge of prosecution and punishment for the crime upon himself, in the name of the Parliament of Toulouse. The effects of the Marquis were sealed up, and he was to be conveyed to the prison at Montpellier: but he could not arrive there before night for some reason; and the inhabitants of the town illuminated it in order that the populace might see the face of the accused criminal, as he came slowly up the street. The ladies of Avignon, and those of Montpellier, put on mourning for the murdered Madame de Gange, as if she had been a near relation. Her mother, of whom we hear very little until now, led the chorus of feminine indignation. She vowed vengeance

against the Marquis, and swore that she would pursue him through every court of justice in the kingdom, till her daughter was avenged. She published a pamphlet on the case, to which M. de Gange replied, saying that her statements were all based on presumption. But the stern hand of the law was upon him, and from it he could not so easily escape. M. de Catelan twice interrogated the Marquis, the last time for eleven hours; the basis on which he founded his questions being not "presumptions," but the evidence which the lawyer had obtained from the dying Madame de Gange in that interview which they two had had alone. On the 21st of August, 1667, judgment was given through the mouth of the President of the Parliament of Toulouse. It was always supposed by the public that the powerful relations of the Marquis had used unfair means to mitigate the severity of the sentence. But it was severe enough, if only it had been carried into execution. The Abbé and the Chevalier de Gange were to be broken alive upon the wheel. The Marquis was to be banished for life, to be degraded from his rank, and to have all his lands, goods, and property confiscated to the use of the king. The chaplain, Perrette, was to be deprived of ecclesiastical orders, and to become a galley-slave for life.

The ladies of Avignon and Montpellier were indignant that the Marquis de Gange was not to be broken on the wheel as well as his brothers. But where were these three guilty men? The Abbé and the Chevalier had escaped by sea, months ago; and now the Marquis had made his way out of the prison of Toulouse; prison doors, in those days, had a fatal facility in opening before rank or wealth. The Marquis and the Chevalier met in Venice—escaped felons as they were. But they took service for the Republic; and, being good Christians, they went to fight the heathen Turks in Candia, where they met an honourable death in 1669. The Abbé, superior in intellect to the others, lived a longer and more eventful life. He fled into Holland, and after some wanderings about he met with an old acquaintance.

who was unscrupulous, or perhaps was ignorant of his crime, and who introduced him to the Count de la Lippe, sovereign prince of Viane, about two leagues from Utrecht. To him the Abbé de Gange was presented as the Sieur de la Martellière, a Frenchman of extraordinary learning and merit, of the Huguenot or Protestant religion, who was consequently under social disadvantages in his own country. The Count was pleased with the appearance and manners of the so-called Sieur de la Martellière, and appointed him governor, or tutor, to his son, a little boy of nine or ten years old.

But by-and-by the persecution of the French Huguenots began, and hundreds of them were leaving France, some one of whom might recognise the former Abbé de Gange, in the Protestant Sieur de la Martellière; so he opposed the settlement of French refugees in the neighbourhood of Viane on purely political reasons. He had been governor to the son of the Count de la Lippe for several years, when he fell desperately in love with a beautiful young girl, a distant relation of the Countess's, who lived with her. His poverty and his dependent position were no obstacles to his marriage with the lovely portionless maiden; but the obscurity of his supposed birth made a marriage between them impossible. He presumed on his services to the Count, and on the years of moral conduct which he had passed under the Count's own eyes. He wrote an eloquent letter, in which he confessed himself to be that Abbé de Gange for whom the kingdom of France had been ransacked in vain; pleading false witness, perjury, passion, whatever you will, in extenuation of the crime of which he was accused; but proving his sixteen quarterings through it all. He spoke of his many years' life of pure morality, such as the Count de la Lippe himself could bear witness to; of his conversion to the faith which the sovereign Prince of Viane held himself, and of his zeal in its interests: had he not advised the Huguenot refugees not to tarry where the long arm of France might reach them, but to fly further east?

His eloquence was all in vain. The Count de la Lippe seems to have been shocked beyond measure at finding out that in the tutor of his little boy—his growing lad—he had been harbouring the profligate, terrible, and infamous Abbé de Gange, with whose crimes all civilised Europe had been made acquainted. The Sieur de la Martellière was ordered to leave the dominions of the Count de la Lippe without delay. He went to Amsterdam, and thither also, without delay, the young girl—the poor, pretty relation of Madame la Comtesse—followed him, and became his wife. His pupil, the young Count, now growing up to manhood, although told by his father what an infamous criminal he had had for tutor, persevered in sending help to the Sieur de la Martellière and his wife at Amsterdam; until some unexpected fortune from one of Madame's relations put them at ease, as far as regarded money. M. de la Martellière bore so high a character that he was admitted into the Consistory of Protestants at Amsterdam. But, wherever he went—at church or at synod, in market or alone with his wife in their most humble secret privacy, he was haunted by the face of Madame de Gange. That was said at the time; that is believed still.

The poor lady's daughter did not do her much credit, and I will say nothing about her. The son, whom she had taught forgiveness on her death-bed, became a captain of dragoons; and, when at Metz, suppressing the Huguenots (perhaps he had never been told of Mademoiselle Brunel, and how she had helped and defended his mother in her great strait), he fell in love with the beautiful wife of a goldsmith. The dragoons were billeted at her house, and tried to force her, at the point of the bayonet, to go to mass. Apparently, her religion was dearer to her than her virtue; for she sent for the captain, and said to him :—"*Monsieur, vous m'avez dit que vous m'aimez; voulez-vous me le prouver? donnez-moi les moyens de sortir du royaume; et pour récompense de ce service, que votre amour s'imagine le prix.*" "*Non, Madame,*" said the Marquis, "*je ne me prévaudrai point de votre situation; je serais au comble de mes vœux si*

vous accordiez à ma tendresse ce que je pourrais obtenir où vous êtes, mais je me reprocherais toute ma vie d'abuser de votre état ; je vais vous en délivrer ; je ne vous demande pour récompense que la grâce de penser quelquefois à moi." After that, he sent her secretly across the frontier.

I shut up my landlady's books, and prepared to go to bed. I am alone in the lofty *salon*, which was perhaps in existence when Madame de Gange used to reside in Avignon; the fire is gone out, the lamp flickers. The ever-persistent wind is tearing round the house. Mary and Irene are fast asleep in the chambers beyond. The quietness of all things, the dead stillness of the hour, has made me realise all the facts deposed to, as if they had only happened to-day. To-morrow we will go to Ville-Neuve, and see the portrait of the murdered lady.

March 16*th*.—Though the *mistral* has but little abated, we went across to Ville-Neuve this morning. Irene was not well enough to go; so Mary and I, attended by Demetrius, our courier, made the expedition. Demetrius has no fancy for excursions off the common route, and only went with us, because he thought himself bound in duty to humour our eccentricity. The suspension-bridge over the Rhone was shaking and trembling with the wind as we crossed it; and our struggle in that long exposure was so exhausting, that when we were once in the comparative tranquillity of the other side, we stood still and looked about us for some time before going on. The colour of the landscape on each side of the rushing river was a warm grey; rocks, soil, buildings, all the same. There was but little vegetation to be seen; a few olive-trees, of a moonlight green, grew in sheltered places. We thought it must be like the aspect of Palestine, from Stanley's account; and Demetrius, who had been several times in the Holy Land, confirmed this notion of ours; but then he was rather apt to confirm all our notions, provided they did not occasion him extra trouble. After we had crossed the bridge, we turned to the right, and went along a steep rocky road to the summit of the hill,

above Ville-Neuve. Below us lay the town founded by Philippe le Bel, but completed by the Popes resident at Avignon, and fallen to comparative decay ever since the papal seat was re-established at Rome.

We dropped down to the centre of the old town; the buildings in it were of the same massive construction as the palace, three miles off, at Avignon; the houses were very lofty, and built of solid blocks of rough yellow-grey stone. There were arcades beneath their lower stories, and but little space between the two sides of the winding streets for carriages or horses. The way through the town was so tortuous that there was no bit of distance ever seen; and we felt as if we had fallen into a crevasse. Not a person was in the deserted streets. After trying at one or two *porte-cochères*, we at length hit upon the convent in which there was the portrait of Madame de Gange, painted by Mignard, her famous contemporary. A nun, in attendance upon the hospital at the end of the court-yard, came to receive us, and was all surprise at our request to see the picture. Was it not the famous painting of "The Last Judgement," done by the good King Réné, that we wished to look at? At any rate, both pictures hung side by side in the ante-chapel to our right on entering. So we went in, and gazed at the face of the heroine of the tragical history we had been reading the night before. She was dressed, like our guide the nun, in a black and white conventual dress, such as I suppose she would assume when *en retraite* after her first husband's death; she held red and white roses in her hands, in her scapular; the lovely colour was needed by the painter, or perhaps *La Belle Provençale* was fond of the flowers. Her face was one of exquisite beauty and great peacefulness of expression—round rather than oval; dark hair, dark eyebrows, and blue eyes; there was very little colour excepting in the lips. You would have called it the portrait of a sweet, happy, young woman, innocently glad in her possession of rare beauty.

After gratifying the nun by looking at the newly-painted

and tawdry chapel beyond, and by doing our utmost to feel admiration for King René's picture, we left the convent. For a minute or two we were full of Madame de Gange; then, I am sorry to say, the carnal feeling of hunger took possession of us, after our long walk; and we sent Demetrius off in every direction to buy us a cake—bread—anything eatable. He came back to where we were sitting under the shelter of a rock. There was no shop for eatables, not even an hotel, or a restaurant, or a *café*, or an *estaminet*. So we came back to the Hôtel de l'Europe, Avignon, with very good appetites for the *table d'hôte*.

March 17*th*.—A telegram from Marseilles. A boat starts to-day for Civita Vecchia.

CROWLEY CASTLE

Sir Mark Crowley was the last baronet of his name, and it is now nearly a century since he died. Last year I visited the ruins of his great old Norman castle, and loitered in the village near, where I heard some of the particulars of the following tale from old inhabitants, who had heard them from their fathers—no further back.

We drove from the little sea-bathing place in Sussex, to see the massive ruins of Crowley Castle, which is the show-excursion of Merton. We had to alight at a field-gate, the road further being too bad for the slightly-built carriage, or the poor tired Merton horse; and we walked for about a quarter of a mile, through uneven ground which had once been an Italian garden; and then we came to a bridge over a dry moat, and went over the groove of a portcullis that had once closed in the massive entrance, into an empty space surrounded by thick walls, draperied with ivy, but unroofed and open to the sky.

We could judge of the beautiful tracery that had been in the windows by the remains of the stone-work here and there; and an old man—"ever so old," as he called himself when we asked his exact age—who scrambled and stumbled out of some lair in the least devastated part of the ruins at our approach, and established himself as guide, showed us a scrap of glass, yet lingering in what was the window of the great drawing-room not above seventy years ago. After he had done his duty, he hobbled with us to the neighbouring church, where the knightly Crowleys lie buried: some commemorated by ancient brasses, some by altar-tombs, some by

fine Latin epitaphs, attributing to them every virtue under the sun. He had to take the church-key back to the adjoining parsonage, at the entrance of the long, straggling street which formed the village of Crowley. The castle and the church were on the summit of a hill, from which we could see the distant line of sea beyond the misty marshes. The village fell away from the church and parsonage down the hill. The aspect of the place was little, if at all, changed from its aspect in 1772.

But I must begin a little earlier. From one of the Latin epitaphs I learnt that Amelia Lady Crowley died in 1756, and was deeply regretted by her loving husband, Sir Mark, who, after a good space of time, came in for his share of posthumous praise. He never married again; though his wife had left him no heir to the name or estate—only a little, tiny girl—Theresa Crowley. This child would inherit her mother's fortune, and all that Sir Mark was free to leave; but this latter was not much, the castle and all the lands going to his sister's son Marmaduke, or, as he was usually called, Duke, Brownlow. Duke's parents were dead, and his uncle was his guardian, and his guardian's house his home. The lad was some seven or eight years older than his cousin; and probably Sir Mark thought that it was not unlikely that his daughter and his heir might make a match. Theresa's mother had some foreign blood in her, and had been brought up in France—not so far away but that its shores might be seen by any one who chose to take an easy day's ride from Crowley Castle for the purpose.

Lady Crowley had been a delicate, elegant creature, but no great beauty, judging from all accounts; Sir Mark's family were famous for their good looks; Theresa, an unusually lucky child, inherited the outward graces of both parents. A portrait which I saw of her, degraded to a station over the parlour chimney-piece in the village-inn, showed me black hair, soft yet arch grey eyes, with brows and lashes of the same tint as her hair; a full, pretty, pouting, passionate mouth, and a round, slender throat.

She was a wilful little creature, and her father's indulgence only made her more wayward. She had a nurse too—a French *bonne*—whose mother had been about my lady from her youth, and who had followed her to England and had died there. Victorine had been in attendance on the young Theresa from her earliest infancy, and almost took the place of a parent in power and affection—in power, as to ordering and arranging almost what she liked, concerning the child's management—in love, because they speak to this day of the black year, when virulent small-pox was rife in Crowley, and when, Sir Mark being far away on some diplomatic mission (in Vienna, I fancy) Victorine shut herself up with Miss Theresa; when the child was taken ill with the loathsome disease, and nursed her night and day. She only succumbed to the dreadful illness, when all danger to the child was over. Theresa came out of it with unblemished beauty; Victorine barely escaped with life, and was disfigured for life.

This disfigurement put a stop to much unfounded scandal which had been afloat respecting the French servant's great influence over Sir Mark. He was, in fact, an easy and indolent man, rarely excited to any vehemence of emotion; and he felt it to be a point of honour to carry out his dead wife's wish that Victorine should never leave Theresa, and that the management of her little child should be confided to her. Only once had there been a struggle between Sir Mark and the *bonne;* and then she had won the victory. And no wonder, if the old butler's account was true. He had gone into the room unawares, and had found Sir Mark and Victorine at high words; and he said that Victorine was white with rage; that her eyes were blazing with passionate fire; that her voice was low and her words were few; but that, although she spoke in French and the butler only knew his native English, he persisted to his dying day in declaring that he would rather have been sworn at by a drunken grenadier with a sword in his hand, than have had those words of Victorine's addressed to him.

Even the choice of Theresa's masters was left to Victorine. A little reference was occasionally made to Madam Hawtrey, the parson's wife, and a distant relation of Sir Mark's; but, seeing that, if Victorine chose to order it, Madam Hawtrey's own little daughter Bessy would have been deprived of the advantages resulting from gratuitous companionship in all Theresa's lessons, she was careful how she opposed or made an enemy of Mademoiselle Victorine. Bessy was a gentle, quiet child, and grew up to be a sensible, sweet-tempered girl, with a very fair share of English beauty; fresh-complexioned, brown-eyed, round-faced, with a stiff though well-made figure that was as different as possible from Theresa's slight, lithe, graceful form. Duke was a young man to these two maidens, while they to him were little more than children. Of course, he admired his cousin Theresa the most—who would not?—but he was establishing his first principles of morality for himself, and her conduct towards Bessy often jarred against his ideas of right.

One day, after she had been tyrannising over the self-contained and patient Bessy so as to make the latter cry—and both the amount of tyranny and the crying were unusual circumstances, for Theresa was of a generous nature when not put out of the way—Duke spoke to his cousin:

"Theresa! you had no right to blame Bessy as you did. It was as much your fault as hers. You were as much bound to remember Mr. Dawson's directions as to what sums you were to do for him as she."

The girl opened her great grey eyes in surprise. She to blame!

"What does Bessy come to the castle for, I wonder? They pay nothing—we pay all. The least she can do is to remember for me what we are told. I shan't trouble myself with attending to Mr. Dawson's directions; and, if Bessy does not like to do it, she can stay away. She already knows enough to earn her bread as a maid; which I suppose is what she'll have to come to."

The moment Theresa had said this, she could have bitten

her tongue out for the meanness and rancour of this speech. She saw pain and disappointment clearly expressed on Duke's face. In another moment, her impulses would have carried her to the opposite extreme, and she would have spoken out her self-reproach. But Duke thought it his duty to remonstrate with her, and to read her a homily which, however true and just, weakened the effect of the look of suffering on his face. Her wits were called into play to refute his arguments; her head rather than her heart took the prominent part in the controversy; and it ended unsatisfactorily to both: he going away with dismal though unspoken prognostics as to what she would become as a woman, if she was so supercilious and unfeeling as a girl; she, the moment his back was turned and she might give way without compromising her pride, throwing herself on the floor, and sobbing as if her heart would break.

Victorine heard her darling's passionate sobs, and came in.

"What hast thou, my angel? Who has been vexing thee—tell me, my cherished!"

She tried to raise the girl; but Theresa would not be lifted up; nor would she speak till she chose, in spite of Victorine's entreaties. When she chose, she lifted herself up, still sitting on the floor; and, putting her tangled hair off her flushed, tear-stained face, she said—

"Never mind; it was only something that Duke said; I don't care for it now." And, refusing Victorine's aid, she got up and stood thoughtfully looking out of the window.

"That Duke!" exclaimed Victorine. "What business has Mr. Duke to go vex my darling? He is not your husband yet, that he should scold you—or that you should mind what he says."

Theresa listened, and gained a new idea; but she gave no sign of her attention, or of her hearing now for the first time that she was supposed to be intended for her cousin's wife. She made no reply to Victorine's caresses and speeches; one might almost say she shook her off. As soon as she was left to herself, she took her hat, and, going on

alone, as she was wont to do, in the pleasure-grounds, she went down the terrace-steps, crossed the bowling-green and opened a little wicket-gate which led into the humble garden of the parsonage. There were Bessy and her mother gathering fruit. It was Bessy whom Theresa sought; there was something in Madam Hawtrey's silky manner that was always rather repugnant to her, whom she wished specially to please; and Theresa would much rather have found her injured playfellow alone.

However, she was not going to shrink from her resolution, because Madam Hawtrey was there. So she went up to the startled Bessy, and said to her, as if she was reciting a prepared speech:

"Bessy, I behaved very crossly to you; I had no business to speak to you as I did."

"Will you forgive me?" was the pre-determined end of this confession; but, somehow, when it came to that, she could not say it, with Madam Hawtrey standing by, ready to smile and curtsey as soon as ever she could catch Theresa's eye.

There was no need to ask for forgiveness, though; for Bessy had put down her half-filled basket, and came softly up to Theresa, stealing her brown, soil-stained little hand into the young lady's soft white one, and looking up at her with loving brown eyes.

"I am so sorry, but I think it was the sums on page 108. I have been looking and looking, and I am almost sure."

Her exculpatory tone caught her mother's ear, although the words did not; and she came up, as she thought, to make peace.

"I am sure, Miss Theresa, Bessy is so grateful for the privileges of learning with you! It is such an advantage to her! I often tell her, 'Take pattern by Miss Theresa and do as she does, and try and speak as she does, and there'll not be a parson's daughter in all Sussex to compare with you.' Don't I, Bessy?"

Theresa shrugged her shoulders—a trick she had caught

from Victorine—and, turning to Bessy, asked her what she was going to do with the gooseberries she was gathering—and, as Theresa spoke, she lazily picked the ripest out of the basket, and ate them.

"They are for a pudding," said Bessy. "As soon as we have gathered enough, I am going in to make it."

"I'll come and help you," said Theresa, eagerly. "I should so like to make a pudding. Our Monsieur Antoine never makes gooseberry-puddings."

Duke came past the parsonage an hour or so afterwards; and, looking in by chance through the open casement-windows of the kitchen, he saw Theresa pinned-up in a bib and apron, her arms all over flour, flourishing a rolling-pin and laughing and chattering with Bessy, similarly attired. Duke had spent his morning, ostensibly in fishing, but in reality in weighing in his own mind what he could do or say to soften the obdurate heart of his cousin. And here it was all inexplicably right, as if by some enchanter's wand!

The only conclusion that Duke could come to was the same that many a wise (and foolish) man had come to before his day: "Well! women are past my comprehension, that's all."

When all this took place, Theresa was about fifteen; Bessy was perhaps six months older; Duke was just leaving Oxford. His uncle, Sir Mark, was excessively fond of him; yes! and proud too, for he had distinguished himself at college, and every one spoke well of him. And he, for his part, loved Sir Mark, and, unspoiled by the fame and reputation he had gained at Christ Church, paid respectful deference to Sir Mark's opinions.

As Theresa grew older, her father thought that he played his cards well in singing Duke's praises on every possible occasion. She tossed her head, and said nothing. Thanks to Victorine's revelations, she understood perfectly the tendency of her father's speeches. She intended to make her own choice of a husband, when the time came; and it might be Duke, or it might be some one else. When Duke

did not lecture or prose, but was sitting his horse so splendidly at the meet, before the huntsman gave the blast, "Found"—when Duke was holding his own in discourse with other men—when Duke gave her one short, sharp word of command on any occasion—then she decided that she would marry him, and no one else. But when he found fault, or stumbled about so awkwardly in a minuet, or talked moralities against duelling, then she was sure that he should never be her husband. She wondered if he knew about it; if any one had told him, as Victorine had told her; if her father had revealed his thoughts and wishes to his nephew as plainly as he had done to his daughter? This last query made her cheeks burn; and, on days when this suspicion had been brought by any chance prominently before her mind, she was especially rude and disagreeable to Duke.

He was to go abroad on the grand tour of Europe, to which young men of fortune usually devoted three years. He was to have a tutor, because all young men of his rank had tutors; else, he was quite wise enough, and steady enough, to have done without one, and probably knew a good deal more about what was to be observed in the countries they were going to visit than Mr. Roberts, his appointed bear-leader. He was to come back, full of historical and political knowledge, speaking French and Italian like a native, and having a smattering of barbarous German; and he was to enter the House—as a county-member, if possible; as a borough member, at the worst—and was to make a great success; and then, as every one understood, he was to marry his cousin Theresa.

He spoke to her father about it before starting on his travels. It was after dinner, in Crowley Castle. Sir Mark and Duke sat alone, each pensive at the thought of the coming parting.

"Theresa is but young," said Duke, breaking into speech after a long silence; "but, if you have no objection, uncle, I should like to speak to her before I leave England—about my—my hopes."

Sir Mark played with his glass; poured out some more wine; drank it off at a draught; and then replied:

"No, Duke, no. Leave her in peace with me. I have looked forward to having her as my companion during these three years; they'll soon pass away" (to age, but not to youth), "and I should like to have her undivided heart till you come back. No, Duke! Three years will soon pass away—and then we'll have a royal wedding."

Duke sighed, but said no more. The next day was the last. He wanted Theresa to go with him, to take leave of the Hawtreys at the Parsonage and of the villagers; but she was wilful and would not accompany him. He remembered, years afterwards, how Bessy's gentle, peaceful manner had struck him, as contrasted with Theresa's, on that last day. Both girls regretted his departure. He had been so uniformly gentle and thoughtful in his behaviour to Bessy that, without any idea of love, she felt him to be her pattern of noble, chivalrous manhood; the only person, except her father, who was steadily kind to her. She admired his sentiments, she esteemed his principles, she considered his long evolvement of his ideas the truest eloquence. He had lent her books, he had directed her studies; all the advice and information which Theresa had rejected had fallen to Bessy's lot, and she had received it thankfully.

Theresa burst into a passion of tears as soon as he and his suite were out of sight. She had refused the farewell kiss her father had ordered her to give him, but had waved her white handkerchief out of the great drawing-room window (that very window in which the old guide showed me the small angle of glass still lingering). But Duke had ridden away without looking back; ridden with slack rein and downcast head; oppressed with the sorrow of parting.

His absence was a great blank in Sir Mark's life. He had never sought London much as a place of residence. In former days he had been suspected of favouring the Stuarts too much for loyalty; but nothing could be proved against him, and he had subsided into a very tolerably faithful

subject of King George the Third. Still, a cold shoulder having been turned to him by the Court party at one time, he had become prepossessed against the English capital. On the contrary, his wife's predilections and his own tendencies had always made Paris a very agreeable place of residence to him. To Paris he at length resorted again, when the blank in his life oppressed him; and from Paris, about two years after Duke's departure on the grand tour, he returned after a short absence from home, and suddenly announced to his daughter and the household that he had taken an apartment in the Rue Louis-le-Grand for the coming winter, to which there was to be an immediate removal of his daughter, Victorine, and certain other personal attendants and servants.

Nothing could exceed Theresa's mad joy at this unexpected news. She sprang upon her father's neck and kissed him till she was tired—whatever he was. She ran to Victorine, and told her to guess what "heavenly bliss" was going to befall them; dancing round the middle-aged woman until she, in her spoilt impatience, was becoming angry; when, kissing her, she told her, and ran off to the Parsonage, and thence to the church, bursting in upon morning prayers—for it was All Saints' Day, though she had forgotten it—and filliping a scrap of paper, on which she had hastily written "We are going to Paris for the winter, all of us," rolled into a ball, from the castle pew to that of the parson. She saw Bessy redden as she caught it, put it into her pocket unread, and, after an apologetic glance at the curtained seat in which Theresa was, go on with her meek responses. Theresa went out by the private door in a momentary fit of passion. "Stupid, cold-blooded creature!" she said to herself.

But that afternoon Bessy came to the castle. She was so sorry, and so losing her own sorrow in sympathy for her friend's gladness, that Theresa took her into favour again. The girls parted, with promises of correspondence and with some regret, the greatest on Bessy's side. Some grand promises of Paris fashions and presents of dress

Theresa made in her patronising way; but Bessy did not seem to care much for them—which was fortunate, as they were never fulfilled.

Sir Mark had an idea in his head of perfecting Theresa's accomplishments and manners by Paris masters and Parisian society. English residents in Venice, Florence, Rome, wrote to their friends at home about Duke. They spoke of him as what at the present day we should call a "rising young man." His praises ran so high, that Sir Mark began to fear lest his handsome nephew, fêted by princes, courted by ambassadors, made love to by lovely Italian ladies, might find Theresa too country-bred for his taste.

Thus had come about the engaging of the splendid apartment in the Rue Louis-le-Grand. The street itself is narrow, and now-a-days we are apt to think the situation close; but in those days it was the height of fashion; for the great arbiter of fashion, the Duc de Richelieu, lived there; and to inhabit an apartment in that street was of itself a mark of *bon-ton*. Victorine seemed almost crazy with delight, when they took possession of their new abode. "This dear Paris! This lovely France! And now I see my young lady, my darling, my angel, in a room suited to her beauty and her rank; such as my lady, her mother, would have planned for her, if she had lived." Any allusion to her dead mother always touched Theresa to the quick. She was in her bed, under the blue silk curtains of an alcove, when Victorine said this—for some time she had been too much fatigued to speak in answer to Victorine's rhapsodies; but now she put out her little hand and gave Victorine's a pressure of gratitude and pleasure.

Next day, she wandered about the rooms, and admired their splendour almost to Victorine's content. Her father, Sir Mark, was out searching for a carriage and horses for his darling's use; and also found that not less necessary article—a married lady of rank who would take his girl under her wing, When all these preliminary arrangements were made, who so wildly happy as Theresa! Her carriage

was of the newest fashion, fit to vie with any on the Course de la Reine, the then fashionable drive. The box at the Grand Opéra and at the Français, which she shared with Madame la Duchesse de G., was the centre of observation; Victorine was in the best humour; Theresa's credit at her dressmakers was unlimited; her indulgent father was charmed with all she did and said. She had masters, it is true, and consequently lessons to attend to; but, to a rich and beautiful young lady, masters were wonderfully complaisant, and with them, as with all the world, she only did what she liked. Of Parisian society, she had enough, and more than enough, of that. The Duchess went everywhere, and Theresa went too. So did a certain Count de Grange: some relation or connection of the Duchess; handsome, with a South of France handsomeness; with delicate features, marred by an over-softness of expression, from which (so men said) the tiger was occasionally seen to peep forth. But, for elegance of dress and demeanour, he had not his fellow in Paris; which of course meant, not in the world.

Sir Mark heard rumours of this man's conduct which were not pleasing to him; but, when he accompanied his daughter into society, the Count was only as deferential as it became a gentleman to be to so much beauty and grace. When Theresa was taken out by the Duchess to the opera, to balls, to *petits soupers*, without her father, then the Count was more than deferential; he was adoring. It was a little intoxicating to a girl, brought up in the solitude of an English village, to have so many worshippers at her feet all at once, in the great gay city; and the inbred coquetry of her nature came out, adding to her outward grace, if taking away from the purity and dignity of her character. It was Victorine's delight to send her darling out arrayed for conquest—her hair delicately powdered, and scented with *maréchale;* her little *mouches* put on so that the tiny half-moon patch lengthened the already almond-shaped eye on one side of Theresa's face, while the minute star gave the effect of a dimple at the corner of her scarlet lips on the

other; the silver gauze looped-up over the petticoat of blue brocade, distended over a hoop, much as gowns are worn in our days; the coral ornaments of her silver fan matching with the tint of the high heels to her shoes. And at night Victorine was never tired of listening and questioning; of triumphing in Theresa's triumphs; of invariably reminding her that she was bound to marry the absent cousin and return to the half-feudal state of the old castle in Sussex.

Still, even now, if Duke had returned from Italy, all might have gone well; but, when Sir Mark, alarmed at the various proposals he received for Theresa's hand from needy French noblemen, and at the admiration she was exciting everywhere, wrote to Duke, and urged him to join them in Paris on his return from his travels, Duke answered that three months were yet unexpired of the time allotted for the grand tour; and that he was anxious to avail himself of that interval to see something of Spain.

Sir Mark read this letter aloud to Theresa, with many expressions of annoyance as he read. Theresa merely said, "Of course, Duke does what he likes," and turned away to see some new lace brought for her inspection. She heard her father sigh over a re-perusal of Duke's letter, and she set her teeth in the anger she would not show in acts or words. That day the Count de Grange met with gentler treatment than he had done for many days—than he had done since her father's letter to Duke had been sent off to Genoa. As ill-fortune would have it, Sir Mark had occasion to return to England at this time; and he, guileless himself, consigned Theresa, and her maid Victorine, and her man Felix, to the care of the Duchess for three weeks. They were to reside at the Hôtel de G. during this time. The Duchess welcomed them in her most caressing manner; and showed Theresa the suite of rooms, with the little private staircase appropriated to her use.

The Count de Grange was an habitual visitor at the house of his cousin the Duchess, who was a gay Parisian, absorbed in her life of giddy dissipation. The Count found

means of influencing Victorine in his favour; not by money —so coarse a bribe would have had no power over her— but by many presents, accompanied by sentimental letters, breathing devotion to her charge and extremest appreciation of the faithful friend whom Theresa looked upon as a mother, and whom for this reason he, the Count, revered and loved. Intermixed were wily allusions to his great possessions in Provence, and to his ancient lineage (the one mortgaged, the other disgraced). Victorine, whose right hand had forgotten its cunning in the length of her dreary vegetation in Crowley Castle, was deceived, and became a vehement advocate of the dissolute Adonis of the Paris salons in his suit for her darling. When Sir Mark came back, he was dismayed and shocked beyond measure by finding the Count and Theresa at his feet, entreating him to forgive their stolen marriage—a marriage which, though incomplete as to its legal forms, was yet too complete to be otherwise than sanctioned by Theresa's nearest friends. The Duchess accused her cousin of perfidy and treason. Sir Mark said nothing. But his health failed from that time, and he sank into an old, querulous, grey-haired man.

There was some ado, I know not what, between Sir Mark and the Count regarding the control and disposition of the fortune Theresa inherited from her mother. The Count gained the victory, owing to the different nature of the French laws from the English; and this made Sir Mark abjure the country and the city he had loved so long. Henceforward, he swore, his foot should never touch French soil. If Theresa liked to come and see him at Crowley Castle, she should be as a daughter of the house ought to be, and ever should be; but her husband should never enter the gates of the house in Sir Mark's lifetime.

For some months he was out of humour with Duke, because of his tardy return from his tour, and his delay in joining them in Paris, by which, so Sir Mark fancied, Theresa's marriage had been brought about. But, when Duke came home depressed in spirits, and submissive to his

uncle even under unjust blame, Sir Mark restored him to favour in the course of a summer's day, and henceforth added another injury to the debtor side of the Count's reckoning.

Duke never told his uncle of the woeful ill-report he had heard of the Count in Paris, where he had found all the better part of the French nobility pitying the lovely English heiress who had been entrapped into a marriage with one of the most disreputable of their order, a gambler and a reprobate. He could not leave Paris without seeing Theresa, whom he believed to be as yet unacquainted with his arrival in the city; so he went to call upon her one evening. She was sitting alone, splendidly dressed, ravishingly lovely; she made a step forwards to meet him, hardly heeding the announcement of his name, for she had recognised a man's tread, and fancied it was her husband coming to accompany her to some grand reception. Duke saw the quick change from hope to disappointment on her mobile face—and she spoke out at once her reason.

"Adolphe promised to come and fetch me; the Princess receives to-night. I hardly expected a visit from you, Cousin Duke," recovering herself into a pretty, proud reserve. "It is a fortnight, I think, since I learnt you were in Paris. I had given up all expectation of the honour of a visit from you!"

Duke felt that, as she had heard of his being there, it was too awkward to make excuses which both he and she would know to be false, or explanations the very truth of which would be offensive to the loving, trusting, deceived wife. So he turned the conversation to his travels, his heart aching for her all the time, as he noticed her wandering attention, when she heard any passing sound. Ten—eleven—twelve o'clock; he would not leave her, he thought his presence was a comfort and a pleasure to her. But, when one o'clock struck, she said some unexpected business must have detained her husband, and she was glad of it, as she had all along felt too much tired to go out; and, besides, the

happy consequence of her husband's detention was the long talk with Duke.

He did not see her again after this polite dismissal; nor did he see her husband at all. Whether through ill-chance or carefully disguised purpose, it did so happen that, though he called several times, and even wrote notes requesting an appointment, when he might come with the certainty of finding the Count and Countess at home, in order to wish them farewell before setting out for England, it was all in vain. But he said nothing to Sir Mark of all this. He only tried to fill up the blanks in the old man's life. He went between Sir Mark and his tenants, to whom he was unwilling to show himself unaccompanied by the beautiful daughter, who had so often been his companion in his walks and rides, before that ill-omened winter in Paris. He was thankful to have the power of returning the long kindness his uncle had shown him in childhood; thankful to be of use to him in his desertion; thankful to atone in some measure for his neglect of his uncle's wish, that he should have made a hasty return to Paris.

But it was a little dull, after the long excitement of travel, after associating with all that was most cultivated, and seeing all that was most famous, in Europe, to be shut up in that vast, magnificent, dreary castle, with Sir Mark for a perpetual companion—Sir Mark and no other. The parsonage was near at hand; and occasionally Mr. Hawtrey came in to visit his parishioner in his trouble. But Sir Mark kept the clergyman at bay. He knew that his brother in age, his brother in circumstances (for had not Mr. Hawtrey an only child, and she a daughter?), was sympathising with him in his sorrow, and he was too proud to bear it; indeed, sometimes he was so rude to his old neighbour, that Duke would go next morning to the Parsonage, to soothe the smart.

And so—and so—gradually, imperceptibly, at last his heart was drawn to Bessy. Her mother angled, and angled skilfully; at first scarcely daring to hope; then, remembering

her own descent from the same stock as Duke, she drew herself up, and set to work with fresh skill and vigour. To be sure, it was a dangerous game for a mother to play; her daughter's happiness was staked on her success. How could simple, country-bred Bessy help being attracted to the courtly, handsome man, travelled and accomplished, good and gentle, whom she saw every day, and who treated her with the kind familiarity of a brother; while he was not a brother, but in some measure a disappointed man, as everybody knew? Bessy was a daisy of an English maiden, pure and good to the heart's core and most hidden thought; sensible in all her accustomed daily ways; yet not so much without imagination as not to desire something beyond the narrow range of knowledge and experience in which her days had hitherto been passed. Add to this a pretty figure, a bright, healthy complexion, lovely teeth, and quite enough of beauty in her other features to have rendered her the belle of a country town, if her lot had been cast in such a place—and it is not to be wondered at that, after she had been secretly in love with Duke with all her heart for nearly a year, almost worshipping him, he should discover that, of all the women he had ever known—except, perhaps, the lost Theresa—Bessy Hawtrey had it in her power to make him the happiest of men.

Sir Mark grumbled a little; but now-a-days he grumbled at everything, poor, disappointed, all but childless old man! As to the vicar, he stood astonished and almost dismayed.

"Have you thought enough about it, Mr Duke?" the parson asked. "Young men are apt to do things in a hurry that they repent at leisure. Bessy is a good girl—a good girl, God bless her; but she has not been brought up as your wife should have been—at least as folks will say your wife should have been—though I may say for her she has a very pretty sprinkling of mathematics. I taught her myself, Duke."

"May I go and ask her myself? I only want your permission," urged Duke.

"Aye, go! But perhaps you had better ask Madam first. She'll like to be told everything as soon as me."

But Duke did not care for Madam. He rushed through the open door of the Parsonage, into the homely sitting-rooms, and softly called for Bessy. When she came, he took her by the hand and led her forth into the field-path at the back of the orchard; and there he won his bride, to the full content of both their hearts.

All this time, the inhabitants of Crowley Castle, and the quiet people of the neighbouring village of Crowley, heard but little of "the Countess," as it was their fashion to call her. Sir Mark had his letters, it is true; and he read them over and over again, and moaned over them, and sighed, and put them carefully aside in a bundle. But they were like arrows of pain to him. No one knew their contents; none, even knowing them, would have dreamed, any more than he did, for all his moans and sighs, of the utter wretchedness of the writer? Love had long since vanished from the habitation of that pair—a habitation, not a home, even in its brightest days. Love had gone out of the window, long before poverty had come in at the door; yet that grim visitant, who never tarries in tracking out a disreputable gambler, had now arrived. The count lost the last remnants of his character as a man who played honourably; and, thenceforth—that being pretty nearly the only sin which banished men from good society in those days—he had to play where and how he could. Theresa's money went as her poor angry father had foretold. By-and-by, and without her consent, her jewel-box was rifled; the diamonds round the locket holding her mother's picture were wrenched and picked out by no careful hand. Victorine found Theresa crying over these poor relics—crying, at last, without disguise and as if her heart would break.

"Oh, mamma! mamma! mamma!" she sobbed out, holding up the smashed and disfigured miniature, as an explanation of her grief. She was sitting on the floor, on which she had thrown herself at the first discovery of the

theft. Victorine sate down by her, taking her head upon her breast, and soothing her. She did not ask who had done it; she asked Theresa no questions which the latter would have shrunk from answering; she knew all in that hour, without the Count's name having passed either of their lips. But from that time she watched him, as a tiger watches his prey.

When the letters came from England, the three letters from Sir Mark and the affianced bride and bridegroom, announcing the approaching marriage of Duke and Bessy, Theresa took them straight to Victorine. Theresa's lips were tightened; her pale cheeks were paler. She waited for Victorine to speak. Not a word did the French woman utter; but she smoothed the letters one over the other, and tore them right in two, throwing the pieces on the ground and stamping on them.

"Oh, Victorine!" said Theresa, dismayed at passion that went so far beyond her own. "I never expected it; I never thought of it—but perhaps it was but natural."

"It was not natural; it was infamous! To have loved you once, and not to wait for chances, but to take up with that mean, poor girl at the Parsonage! Pah! and *her* letter! Sir Mark is of my mind, though, I can see. I am sorry I tore up his letter. He feels, he knows, that Mr. Duke Brownlow ought to have waited, waited, waited. Some one waited fourteen years, did he not? The Count will not live for ever."

Theresa did not see the face of wicked meaning as these last words were spoken.

Another year rolled heavily on its course of wretchedness to Theresa. That same revolution of time brought only the increase of peace and joy to the English couple, striving humbly, striving well, to do their duty as children to the unhappy, deserted Sir Mark. They had their reward in the birth of a little girl. Yet close on this birth followed a great sorrow. The good parson died after a short, sudden illness, tended by his daughter and her husband as assiduously as

by his wife, whose one great merit was her appreciating love for her virtuous husband. Then came the customary trouble after the death of a clergyman; the widow had to make haste and leave the Parsonage, the home of a lifetime, and seek a new resting-place for her declining years.

Fortunately for all parties, the new vicar was a bachelor —no other than the tutor who had accompanied Duke on his grand tour; and it was almost made a condition that he was to allow the widow of his predecessor to remain at the Parsonage as his housekeeper. Bessy would fain have had her mother at the castle; and this course would have been infinitely preferred by Madam Hawtrey, who indeed suggested the wish to her daughter. But Sir Mark was obstinately set against it; nor did he spare his caustic remarks on Madam Hawtrey, even before her own daughter. He had never quite forgiven Duke's marriage, although he was personally exceedingly fond of Bessy. He referred this marriage, in some part, and perhaps to no greater extent than was true, to Madam's good management in throwing the young people together; and he was explicit in the expression of his opinion.

Poor Theresa! Every day she more and more bitterly rued her ill-starred marriage. Often and often she cried to herself, when she was alone in the dead of the night, "I cannot bear it—I cannot bear it longer." But again, in the daylight, her pride helped her to keep her woe to herself. She could not bear the gaze of pitying eyes; she could not bear even Victorine's fierce sympathy. She might have gone home like a poor prodigal to her father, if Duke and Bessy had not, as she imagined, reigned triumphant in her place, both in her father's heart and in her father's home. And, all this while, that father almost hated the tender attentions which were rendered to him by those who were not his Theresa—his only child, for whose presence he yearned and longed in silent misery. Then again (to return to Theresa), her husband had his fits of kindness towards her. If he had been very fortunate in play, if he had heard other men

admire her, he would come back for a few moments to his loyalty, and would lure back the poor tortured heart; only to crush it afresh.

One day, after a short time of easy temper, caresses, and levity, she found out something, I know not what, in his life which stung her to the quick. Her sharp wits and sharper tongue spoke out most cutting insults; at first he smiled, as if amused to see how she was ransacking her brain to find stabbing speeches; but at length she touched some sore. He scarcely lost the mocking smile upon his face; but his eyes flashed lurid fire, and his heavy closed hand fell on her white shoulder with a terrible blow. She stood up facing him, tearless, deadly white. "The poor old man at home!" was all she said, trembling, shivering all over, but with her eyes fixed on his coward's face. He shrank from her look; laughed aloud to hide whatever feeling might be hidden in his bosom; and left the room. She only said again, "The poor old man—the poor old deserted, desolate man!" and felt about blindly for a chair.

She had not sat down a minute though, before she started up and rang her bell. It was Victorine's office to answer it; but Theresa looked almost surprised to see her.

"You!—I wanted the others—I want them all! They shall all see how their master treats his wife! Look here" —and she pushed the gauze neck-kerchief off her shoulder; the mark was there red and swollen. "Bid them all come here, Victorine—Amadée, Jean, Adèle, all! I will be justified by their testimony—whatever I do."

Then she fell to shaking and crying. Victorine said nothing, but went to a certain cupboard where she kept medicines and drugs of which she alone knew the properties; and then she mixed a draft, which she made her mistress take. Whatever its nature was, it was soothing. Theresa leaned back in her chair, still sobbing heavily from time to time, till at last she dropped into a kind of a doze. Then Victorine softly lifted the neck-kerchief, which had fallen into its place, and looked at the mark. She did not speak; but

her whole face was a fearful threat. After she had looked her fill, she smiled a deadly smile. And then she touched the soft bruised flesh with her lips, much as though Theresa were the child she had been twenty years ago. Soft as the touch was, Theresa shivered and started and half awoke. "Are they come," she murmured, "Amadée, Jean, Adèle?" but, without waiting for an answer, she fell asleep again.

Victorine went quietly back to the cupboard where she kept her drugs, and stayed there, mixing something noiselessly. When she had done what she had wanted, she returned to her mistress's bedroom and looked at her, still sleeping. Then she began to arrange the room. No blue silk curtains and silver mirrors now, as in the Rue Louis-le-Grand. A washed-out, faded Indian chintz and an old battered toilette service of Japan-ware; the disorderly signs of the Count's late presence; an emptied flask of liqueur.

All the time Victorine arranged this room, she kept saying to herself, "At last, at last!" Theresa slept through the daylight—slept late into the evening, leaning back where she had fallen in her chair. She was so motionless that Victorine appeared alarmed. Once or twice, she felt her pulse, and gazed earnestly into the tear-stained face. Once, she very carefully lifted one of the white eyelids, and, holding a lighted taper near, peered into the eye. Apparently she was satisfied; for she went out and ordered a basin of broth to be ready when she asked for it. Again she sate in deepest silence; nothing stirred in the closed chamber; but in the street the carriages began to roll, and the footmen and torch-bearers to cry aloud their masters' names and titles, to show what carriage in that narrow street was entitled to precedence. A carriage stopped at the hôtel of which they occupied the third floor. Then the bell of their apartment rang loudly, rang violently. Victorine went out to see what it was that might disturb her darling—as she called Theresa to herself—her sleeping lady, as she spoke of her to her servants.

She met those servants bringing in her master, the Count,

dead. Dead with a sword-wound in some ignoble, infamous struggle. Victorine stood and looked at him for a moment or two. "Better so," she muttered; "better so! But, monseigneur, you shall take this with you, whithersoever your wicked soul is fleeing." And she struck him a light stroke on his shoulder, just where Theresa's bruise was. It was as light a stroke as well could be; but this irreverence to the dead called forth indignation even from the hardened bearers of the body. Little recked Victorine. She turned her back on the corpse, went to her cupboard, took out the mixture she had made with so much care, poured it out upon the wooden floor, smeared it about with her foot.

A fortnight later, when no news had come from Theresa for many weeks, a poor sort of chaise was seen from the castle-windows lumbering slowly up the carriage-road to the gate. No one thought much of it; perhaps it was some friend of the housekeeper's; perhaps it might even be some humble relation of Mrs. Duke's (for many such had found out their cousin since her marriage). No one noticed the shabby carriage much, till the hall-porter was startled by the sound of the great bell pealing and, on opening wide the hall-doors, saw standing before him the Mademoiselle Victorine of old days, thinner, sallower, in mourning. In the carriage sate Theresa, in the deep widow's weeds of those days. She looked out of the carriage window wistfully, beyond Joseph, the hall porter.

"My father?" said she eagerly, before Victorine could speak. "Is Sir Mark—well?" ("Alive," was her first thought; but she dared not give the word utterance.)

"Call Mr. Duke," said Joseph, speaking to some one unseen. Then he came forwards, "God bless you, miss; God bless you! And this day of all days! Sir Mark is well—leastways, he's sadly changed. Where's Mr. Duke? Call him! My young lady's fainting."

And this was Theresa's return home. None ever knew how much she had suffered since she had left home. If any one had known, Victorine would never have stood there,

dressed in that mourning. She put it on, sorely against her will, for the purpose of upholding her lying fiction of Theresa's having been a happy, prosperous marriage. She was always indignant, if any of the old servants fell back into the once familiar appellation of "Miss Theresa." "The Countess," she would say in lofty rebuke.

What passed between Theresa and her father at that first interview no one ever knew. Whether she told him anything of her married life, or whether she only soothed the tears he shed on seeing her again, by sweet repetition of tender words and caresses—such as are the sugared pabulum of age as well as of infancy—was always a mystery. Neither Duke nor his wife ever heard her allude to the time she had passed in Paris, except in the most cursory and superficial manner. Sir Mark was anxious to show her all was forgiven, and would fain have displaced Bessy from her place as lady of the castle, and made Theresa take the headship of the house, and sit at table where the mistress ought to be. And Bessy would have given up these onerous dignities without a word; for Duke was always more jealous for his wife's position than she herself was. But Theresa declined to assume any such place in the household, saying, in the languid way that now seemed habitual to her, that English housekeeping and all the domestic arrangements of an English country-house were cumbrous and wearisome to her; that, if Bessy would continue to act as she had done hitherto, and would so forestall what must be her natural duties at some future period, she, Theresa, should be infinitely obliged.

Bessy consented; and in everything she tried to remember what Theresa liked, and how affairs were ordered in the old Theresa days. She wished the servants to feel that "the Countess" had equal rights with herself in the management of the house. But she to whom the housekeeper takes her accounts, she in whose hands the power of conferring favours and privileges remains *de facto*, will always be held by servants as the mistress; and Theresa's claims soon sank

into the background. At first she was too broken-spirited, too languid, to care for anything but quiet rest in her father's companionship. They sate sometimes for hours hand-in-hand; or they sauntered out on the terraces, hardly speaking, but happy; because they were once more together, and once more on loving terms. Theresa grew strong during this time of gentle, brooding peace. The pinched, pale face of anxiety, lined with traces of suffering, relaxed into the soft oval; the light came into the eyes, the colour into the cheeks.

But, in the autumn after her return, Sir Mark died. It had been a gradual decline of strength, and his last moments were spent in her arms. Her new misfortune threw her back into the wan, worn creature she had been when she first came home, a widow, to Crowley Castle. She shut herself up in her rooms, and allowed no one to come near her but Victorine. Neither Duke nor Bessy was admitted into the darkened apartments, which she had hung with black cloth in solemn funereal state.

Victorine's life since her return to the castle had been anything but peaceable. New powers had arisen in the house-keeper's room. Madam Brownlow had her maid, far more exacting than Madam Brownlow herself; and a new house-keeper reigned in the place of her who was formerly only an echo of Victorine's opinions. Victorine's own temper, too, was not improved by her four years abroad, and there was a very general disposition among the servants to resist all her assumption of authority. She felt her powerlessness, after a struggle or two, but treasured up her vengeance. If she had lost power over the household, there was no diminution of her influence over her mistress. It was her device at last that lured the Countess out of the gloomy seclusion.

Almost the only creature Victorine cared for besides Theresa, was the little Mary Brownlow. What there was of softness in her woman's nature seemed to come out towards children; though, if the child had been a boy instead of a

girl, it is probable that Victorine would not have taken her into her good graces. As it was, the French nurse and the English child were capital friends; and, when Victorine sent Mary into the Countess's room, and bade her not be afraid, but ask the lady in her infantile babble to come out and see Mary's snow-man, she knew the little one, for her sake, would put her small hand into Theresa's, and thus plead with more success, because with less purpose, than any one else had been able to plead. Out came Theresa, colourless and sad; holding Mary by the hand. They went, unobserved as they thought, to the great gallery-window, and looked out into the court-yard; then Theresa returned to her rooms. But the ice was broken, and, before the winter was over, Theresa fell into her old ways, and sometimes smiled, and sometimes even laughed; until chance visitors again spoke of her rare beauty and her courtly grace.

It was noticeable, too, that she began to revive out of her lassitude to an interest in all Duke's pursuits. She grew weary of Bessy's smaller cares and domestic talk—now about the servants, now about her mother and the Parsonage, now about the parish. She questioned Duke about his travels, and could enter into his appreciation and judgment of foreign nations; she perceived the latent powers of his mind; she became impatient of their remaining dormant in country seclusion. She had spoken about leaving Crowley Castle, and of finding some other home, soon after her father's death; but both Duke and Bessy had urged her to stay with them; Bessy saying, in the pure innocence of her heart, how glad she was to think that, in the probable increasing cares of her nursery, Duke would have a companion so much to his mind.

About a year after Sir Mark's death one of the members for Sussex died; and Theresa set herself to stir up Duke to assume his place. With some difficulty—for Bessy was passive, perhaps even opposed to the scheme in her quiet way—Theresa succeeded; and Duke was elected. She was vexed at Bessy's torpor, as she called it, in the whole affair—

vexed, as she now often was, with Bessy's sluggish interest in all things beyond her immediate ken. Once, when Theresa tried to make Bessy perceive how Duke might shine and rise in his new sphere, Bessy burst into tears, and said—

"You speak as if his presence here were nothing, and his fame in London everything. I cannot help fearing he will leave off caring for all the quiet ways of going on, in which we have been so happy ever since we have been married."

"But when he is here," replied Theresa, "and when he wants to talk to you of politics, of foreign news, of great public interests, you drag him down to your level of woman's cares."

"Do I?" said Bessy, plaintively. "Do I drag him down? I wish I was cleverer; but you know, Theresa, I was never clever in anything but housewifery."

Theresa was touched for a moment by this humility.

"Yet, Bessy, you have a great deal of judgment, if you will but exercise it. Try and take an interest in all he cares for, as well as making him try and take an interest in your affairs!"

But, somehow, this kind of conversation too often ended in dissatisfaction on both sides; and the servants gathered by induction, rather than from words, that the two ladies were not on the most cordial terms, however friendly they might wish to be, and might strive to appear. Madam Hawtrey, too, allowed her jealousy of Theresa to deepen into dislike. She was jealous, because, in some unreasonable way, she had taken it into her head that Theresa's presence at the castle was the reason why she was not urged to take up her abode there, on Sir Mark's death; as if there had not been rooms and suites of rooms enough to lodge a multitude of dowagers in the building, if the owner so wished. But Duke had certain ideas pretty strongly fixed in his mind, and one was a repugnance to his mother-in-law's constant company. He increased her income greatly, as soon as this was in

his power; and he left it entirely to herself how she should spend it.

Having now the means of travelling about, Madam Hawtrey betook herself pretty frequently to such watering-places as were in vogue at that day, or went to pay visits at the houses of those friends who occasionally came lumbering up in shabby vehicles, to visit their cousin Bessy at the castle. Theresa cared little for Madame Hawtrey's coldness; perhaps, indeed, never perceived it. She gave up striving with Bessy, too; it was hopeless to try to make her an intellectual ambitious companion to her husband. He had spoken in the House; he had written a pamphlet that made much noise; the minister of the day had sought him out, and was trying to attach him to the government. Theresa, with her Parisian experience of the way in which women influenced politics, would have given anything for the Brownlows to have taken a house in London. She longed to see the great politicians, to find herself in the thick of the struggle for place and power, the brilliant centre of all that was worth hearing and seeing in the kingdom. There had been some talk of this same London house; but Bessy had pleaded against it earnestly, while Theresa sat by in indignant silence, until she could bear the discussion no longer; going off to her own sitting-room, where Victorine was at work. Here her pent-up words found vent—not addressed to her servant, but not restrained before her:

"I cannot bear it—to see him cramped in by her narrow mind; to hear her weak selfish arguments, urged because she feels she would be out of place beside him. And Duke is hampered with this woman: he whose powers are unknown even to himself, or he would put her feeble nature on one side, and seek his higher atmosphere. How he would shine! How he does shine! Good Heaven! To think——"

And here she sank into silence, watched by Victorine's furtive eyes.

Duke had excelled all he had previously done by some great burst of eloquence, and the country rang with his

words. He was to come down to Crowley Castle for a parliamentary recess, which occurred almost immediately after this. Theresa calculated the hours of each part of the complicated journey, and could have told to five minutes when he might be expected; but the baby was ill and absorbed all Bessy's attention. She was in the nursery by the cradle in which the child slept, when her husband came riding up to the castle gate. But Theresa was at the gate; her hair all out of powder, and blowing away into dishevelled curls, as the hood of her cloak fell back; her lips parted with a breathless welcome; her eyes shining out love and pride. Duke was but mortal. All London chanted his rising fame; and here in his home Theresa seemed to be the only person who appreciated him.

The servants clustered in the great hall; for it was now some length of time since he had been at home. Victorine was there, with some head-gear for her lady; and when, in reply to his inquiry for his wife, the grave butler asserted that she was with young master, who was, they feared, very seriously ill, Victorine said, with the familiarity of an old servant, and as if to assuage Duke's anxiety: "Madam fancies the child is ill, because she can think of nothing but him, and perpetual watching has made her nervous." The child, however, was really ill; and, after a brief greeting to her husband, Bessy returned to her nursery, leaving Theresa to question, to hear, to sympathise. That night she gave way to another burst of disparaging remarks on poor motherly, homely Bessy, and that night Victorine thought she read a deeper secret in Theresa's heart.

The child was scarcely ever out of its mother's arms; but the illness became worse, and it was nigh unto death. Some cream had been set aside for the little wailing creature, and Victorine had unwittingly used it for the making of a cosmetic for her mistress. When the servant in charge of it reproved her, a quarrel began as to their respective mistress's right to give orders in the household. Before the dispute ended, pretty strong things had been said on both sides.

The child died. The heir was lifeless; the servants were in whispering dismay and bustling discussion of their mourning; Duke felt the vanity of fame, as compared to a baby's life. Theresa was full of sympathy, but dared not express it to him; so tender was her heart becoming. Victorine regretted the death in her own way. Bessy lay speechless, and tearless; not caring for loving voices, nor for gentle touches; taking neither food nor drink; neither sleeping nor weeping. "Send for her mother," the doctor said; for Madam Hawtrey was away on her visits, and the letters telling her of her grandchild's illness had not reached her in the slow-delaying cross-country posts of those days. So she was sent for, by a man riding express, as a quicker and surer means than the post.

Meanwhile, the nurses, exhausted by their watching, found the care of little Mary by day quite enough. Madam's maid sat up with Bessy for a night or two; Duke striding in from time to time through the dark hours, to look at the white, motionless face, which would have seemed like the face of one dead, but for the long-quivering sighs that came up from the over-laden heart. The doctor tried his drugs in vain, and then he tried again. This night, Victorine, at her own earnest request, sat up instead of the maid. As usual, towards midnight, Duke came stealing in with shaded light. "Hush!" said Victorine, her finger on her lips. "She sleeps at last." Morning dawned faint and pale, and still she slept. The doctor came, and stole in on tip-toe, rejoicing in the effect of his drugs. They all stood round the bed; Duke, Theresa, Victorine. Suddenly the doctor—a strange change upon him, a strange fear in his face—felt the patient's pulse, put his ear to her open lips, called for a glass—a feather. The mirror was not dimmed, the delicate fibres stirred not. Bessy was dead.

I pass rapidly over many months. Theresa was again overwhelmed with grief, or rather, I should say, remorse; for, now that Bessy was gone, and buried out of sight, all her innocent virtues, all her feminine homeliness, came

vividly into Theresa's mind—not as wearisome, but as admirable, qualities of which she had been too blind to perceive the value. Bessy had been her own old companion too, in the happy days of childhood, and of innocence. Theresa rather shunned than sought Duke's company now. She remained at the castle, it is true, and Madam Hawtrey, as Theresa's only condition of continuing where she was, came to live under the same roof. Duke felt his wife's death deeply, but reasonably, as became his character. He was perplexed by Theresa's bursts of grief, knowing, as he dimly did, that she and Bessy had not lived together in perfect harmony. But he was much in London now; a rising statesman; and when, in autumn, he spent some time at the castle, he was full of admiration for the strangely patient way in which Theresa behaved towards the old lady. It seemed to Duke that in his absence Madam Hawtrey had assumed absolute power in his household, and that the high-spirited Theresa submitted to her fantasies with even more docility than her own daughter would have done. Towards Mary, Theresa was always kind and indulgent.

Another autumn came; and before it went, old ties were renewed, and Theresa was pledged to become her cousin's wife.

There were two people strongly affected by this news when it was promulgated; one—and this was natural under the circumstances—was Madam Hawtrey; who chose to resent the marriage as a deep personal offence to herself as well as to her daughter's memory, and who, sternly rejecting all Theresa's entreaties, and Duke's invitation to continue her residence at the castle, went off into lodgings in the village. The other person strongly affected by the news was Victorine.

From being a dry active energetic middle-aged woman, she now, at the time of Theresa's engagement, sank into the passive languor of advanced life. It seemed as if she felt no more need of effort, or strain, or exertion. She sought solitude; liked nothing better than to sit in her room adjoining

Theresa's dressing-room, sometimes sunk in a reverie, sometimes employed on an intricate piece of knitting with almost spasmodic activity. But wherever Theresa went, thither would Victorine go. Theresa had imagined that her old nurse would prefer being left at the castle, in the soothing tranquillity of the country, to accompanying her and her husband to the house in Grosvenor Square, which they had taken for the parliamentary season. But the mere offer of a choice seemed to irritate Victorine inexpressibly. She looked upon the proposal as a sign that Theresa considered her as superannuated—that her nursling was weary of her, and wished to supplant her services by those of a younger maid. It seemed impossible to dislodge this idea when it had once entered into her head, and it led to frequent bursts of temper, in which she violently upbraided Theresa for her ingratitude towards so faithful a follower.

One day, Victorine went a little further in her expressions than usual, and Theresa, usually so forbearing towards her, turned at last. "Really, Victorine!" she said, "this is misery to both of us. You say you never feel so wicked as when I am near you; that my ingratitude is such as would be disowned by fiends; what can I, what must I do? You say you are never so unhappy as when you are near me; must we, then, part? Would that be for your happiness?"

"And is that what it has come to!" exclaimed Victorine. "In my country they reckon a building secure against wind and storm and all the ravages of time, if the first mortar used has been tempered with human blood. But not even our joint secret, though it was tempered well with blood, can hold our lives together! How much less all the care, all the love, that I lavished upon you in the days of my youth and strength!"

Theresa came close to the chair in which Victorine was seated. She took hold of her hand and held it fast in her own. "Speak, Victorine," said she, hoarsely, "and tell me what you mean. *What* is our joint secret? And what do

you mean by its being a secret of blood? Speak out! I WILL know."

"As if you did not know!" replied Victorine, harshly. "You don't remember my visits to Bianconi, the Italian chemist in the Marais, long ago?" She looked into Theresa's face, to see if her words had suggested any deeper meaning than met the ear. No; Theresa's look was stern, but free and innocent.

"You told me you went there to learn the composition of certain unguents, and cosmetics, and domestic medicines."

"Ay, and paid high for my knowledge, too," said Victorine, with a low chuckle. "I learned more than you have mentioned, my lady countess. I learnt the secret nature of many drugs—to speak plainly, I learnt the art of poisoning. And," suddenly standing up, "it was for your sake I learnt it. For your service—you—who would fain cast me off in my old age! For you!"

Theresa blanched to a deadly white. But she tried to move neither feature nor limb, nor to avert her eyes for one moment from the eyes that defied her. "For my service, Victorine?"

"Yes! The quieting draught was all ready for your husband, when they brought him home dead."

"Thank God, his death does not lie at your door!"

"Thank God?" mocked Victorine. "The wish for his death does lie at your door; and the intent to rid you of him does lie at my door. And I am not ashamed of it. Not I! It was not for myself I would have done it, but because you suffered so. He had struck you, whom I had nursed on my breast."

"Oh, Victorine!" said Theresa, with a shudder. "Those days are past. Do not let us recall them! I was so wicked because I was so miserable; and now I am so happy, so inexpressibly happy, that—do let me try to make you happy too!"

"You ought to try," said Victorine, not yet pacified; "can't you see how the incomplete action, once stopped by

Fate, was tried again, and with success; and how you are now reaping the benefit of my sin, if sin it was?"

"Victorine! I do not know what you mean!" But some terror must have come over her, she so trembled and so shivered.

"Do you not indeed? Madam Brownlow, the country girl from Crowley Parsonage, needed sleep, and would fain forget the little child's death that was pressing on her brain. I helped the doctor to his end. She sleeps now, and she has met her baby before this, if priests' tales are true. And you, my beauty, my queen, you reign in her stead! Don't treat the poor Victorine as if she were mad, and speaking in her madness. I have heard of tricks like that being played, when the crime was done, and the criminal of use no longer."

That evening, Duke was surprised by his wife's entreaty and petition that she might leave him, and return with Victorine and her other personal servants to the seclusion of Crowley Castle. She, the great London toast, the powerful enchantress of society, and, most of all, the darling wife and true companion, with this sudden fancy for this complete retirement, and for leaving her husband when he was first fully entering into the comprehension of all that a wife might be! Was it ill-health? Only last night she had been in dazzling beauty, in brilliant spirits; this morning only, she had been so merry and tender. But Theresa denied that she was in any way indisposed; and seemed suddenly so unwilling to speak of herself, and so much depressed, that Duke saw nothing for it but to grant her wish and let her go. He missed her terribly. No more pleasant *tête-à-tête* breakfasts, enlivened by her sense and wit, and cheered by her pretty caressing ways. No gentle secretary now, to sit by his side through long, long hours, never weary. When he went into society, he no longer found his appearance watched and waited for by the loveliest woman there. When he came home from the House at night, there was no one to take an interest in his speeches, to be indignant at all

that annoyed him, and charmed and proud of all the admiration he had won. He longed for the time to come when he would be able to go down for a day or two to see his wife; for her letters appeared to him dull and flat after her bright companionship. No wonder that her letters came out of a heavy heart, knowing what she knew.

She scarcely dared to go near Victorine, whose moods were becoming as variable as though she were indeed the mad woman she had tauntingly defied Theresa to call her. At times she was miserable, because Theresa looked so ill, and seemed so deeply unhappy. At other times she was jealous, because she fancied Theresa shrank from her and avoided her. So, wearing her life out with passion, Victorine's health grew daily worse and worse during that summer.

Theresa's only comfort seemed to be little Mary's society. She seemed as though she could not lavish love enough upon the motherless child, who repaid Theresa's affection with all the pretty demonstrativeness of her age. She would carry the little three-year-old maiden in her arms when she went to see Victorine, or would have Mary playing about in her dressing-room, if the old Frenchwoman, for some jealous freak, would come and arrange her lady's hair with her trembling hands. To avoid giving offence to Victorine, Theresa engaged no other maid; to shun over-much or over-frank conversation with Victorine, she always had little Mary with her, when there was a chance of the French waiting-maid coming in. For the presence of the child was a holy restraint even on Victorine's tongue; she would sometimes check her fierce temper, to caress the little creature playing at her knees, and would only dart a covert bitter sting at Theresa under the guise of a warning against ingratitude, addressed to Mary.

Theresa drooped and drooped in this dreadful life. She sought out Madam Hawtrey, and prayed her to come on a long visit to the castle. She was lonely, she said, asking for madam's company as a favour to herself. Madam Hawtrey was difficult to persuade; but, the more she

resisted, the more Theresa entreated; and, when once madam was at the castle, her own daughter had never been so dutiful, so humble a slave to her slightest fancy as was the proud Theresa now.

Yet, for all this, the lady of the castle drooped and drooped; and, when Duke came down to see his darling he was in utter dismay at her looks. Yet she said she was well enough, only tired. If she had anything more upon her mind, she refused him her confidence. He watched her narrowly, trying to forestall her smallest desires. He saw her tender affection for Mary, and thought he had never seen so lovely and tender a mother to another woman's child. He wondered at her patience with Madam Hawtrey, remembering how often his own stock had been exhausted by his mother-in-law, and how the brilliant Theresa had formerly scouted and flouted at the vicar's wife. With all this renewed sense of his darling's virtues and charms, the idea of losing her was too terrible to bear.

He would listen to no pleas, to no objections. Before he returned to town, where his presence was a political necessity, he sought the best medical advice that could be had in the neighbourhood. The doctors came; they could make but little out of Theresa, if her vehement assertion was true that she had nothing on her mind. Nothing.

"Humour him at least, my dear lady!" said the doctor, who had known Theresa from her infancy, but who, living at the distant county-town, was only called in on the Olympian occasions of great state illnesses. "Humour your husband, and perhaps do yourself some good too, by consenting to his desire that you should have change of air. Brighthelmstone is a quiet village by the sea-side. Consent, like a gracious lady, to go there for a few weeks."

So, Theresa, worn out with opposition, consented, and Duke made all the arrangements for taking her, and little Mary, and the necessary suite of servants, to Brighton, as we call it now. He resolved in his own mind that Theresa's personal attendant should be some woman young enough

to watch and wait upon her mistress, and not Victorine, to whom Theresa was in reality a servant. But of this plan neither Theresa nor Victorine knew anything, until the former was in the carriage with her husband some miles distant from the castle. Then he, a little exultant in the good management by which he supposed he had spared his wife the pain and trouble of decision, told her that Victorine was left behind, and that a new accomplished London maid would await her at her journey's end.

Theresa only exclaimed "Oh! What will Victorine say?" and covered her face, and sat shivering and speechless.

What Victorine did say, when she found out the trick, as she esteemed it, that had been played upon her, was too terrible to repeat. She lashed herself up into an ungoverned passion; and then became so really and seriously ill that the servants went to fetch Madam Hawtrey in terror and dismay. But, when that lady came, Victorine shut her eyes, and refused to look at her. "She has got her daughter in her hand! I will not look!" She shook all the time she uttered these awe-stricken words, as if she were in an ague-fit. "Bring the countess back to me. Let *her* face the dead woman standing there; I will not do it. They wanted her to sleep—and so did the countess, that she might step into her lawful place. Theresa, Theresa, where are you? You tempted me. What I did, I did in your service. And you have gone away, and left me alone with the dead woman! It was the same drug as the doctor gave, after all—only he gave little, and I gave much. My lady the countess spent her money well, when she sent me to the old Italian to learn his trade. Lotions for the complexion, and a discriminating use of poisonous drugs. I discriminated, and Theresa profited; and now she is his wife, and has left me here alone with the dead woman. Theresa, Theresa, come back and save me from the dead woman!"

Madam Hawtrey stood by, horror-stricken. "Fetch the vicar," said she, under her breath, to a servant.

"The village-doctor is coming," said some one near. "How she raves! Is it delirium?"

"It is no delirium," said Bessy's mother. "Would to Heaven it were!"

Theresa had a happy day with her husband at Brighthelmstone, before he set off on his return to London. She watched him riding away, his servant following with his portmanteau. Often and often did Duke look back at the figure of his wife, waving her handkerchief, till a turn of the road hid her from his sight. He had to pass through a little village not ten miles from his home; and there a servant, with his letters and further luggage, was to await him. There he found a mysterious, imperative note, requiring his immediate presence at Crowley Castle. Something in the awe-stricken face of the servant from the castle led Duke to question him. But all he could say was, that Victorine lay dying, and that Madam Hawtrey had said that after that letter the master was sure to return, and so would need no luggage. Something lurked behind, evidently. Duke rode home at speed. The vicar was looking out for him. "My dear boy," said he, relapsing into the old relations of tutor and pupil, "prepare yourself."

"What for?" said Duke, abruptly; for the being told to prepare himself, without being told for what, irritated him in his present mood. "Victorine is dead?"

"No! She says she will not die until she has seen you, and got you to forgive her, if Madam Hawtrey will not. But first read this: it is a terrible confession, made by her before me, a magistrate, believing herself to be on the point of death!"

Duke read the paper—containing little more in point of detail than I have already given—the horrible words taken down in the short-hand in which the vicar used to write his mild, prosy sermons: his pupil knew the character of old. Duke read it twice. Then he said: "She is raving, poor creature!" But, for all that, his heart's blood ran cold; and he would fain not have faced the woman, but would rather have remained in doubt to his dying-day.

He went up the stairs three steps at a time, and then turned and faced the vicar, with a look like the stern calmness of death. "I wish to see her alone." He turned out all the watching women, and then he went to the bedside where Victorine sat, half-propped-up with pillows, watching all his doings and his looks, with her hollow, awful eyes. "Now, Victorine, I will read this paper aloud to you. Perhaps your mind has been wandering; but you understand me now?" A feeble murmur of assent met his listening ear. "If any statement in this paper be not true, make me a sign. Hold up your hand—for God's sake hold up your hand! And, if you can do it with truth in this, your hour of dying, the Lord have mercy on you; but, if you cannot hold up your hand, then the Lord have mercy upon me!"

He read the paper slowly; clause by clause he read the paper. No sign; no uplifted hand. At the end she spoke, and he bent his head to listen. "The Countess—Theresa you know—she who has left me to die alone—she" —then mortal strength failed, and Duke was left alone in the chamber of death.

He stayed in the chamber many minutes, quite still. Then he left the room, and said to the first domestic he could find, "The woman is dead. See that she is attended to." But he went to the vicar, and had a long, long talk with him. He sent a confidential servant for little Mary—on some pretext, hardly careful, or plausible enough; but his mood was desperate, and he seemed to forget almost everything but Bessy, his first wife, his innocent girlish bride.

Theresa could ill spare her little darling, and was perplexed by the summons; but an explanation of it was to come in a day or two. It came.

"Victorine is dead; I need say no more. She could not carry her awful secret into the next world, but told all. I can think of nothing but my poor Bessy, delivered over to the cruelty of such a woman. And you, Theresa, I leave you to your conscience, for you have slept in my bosom. Henceforward I am a stranger to you. By the time you

receive this, I, and my child, and that poor murdered girl's mother, will have left England. What will be our next step I know not. My agent will do for you what you need."

Theresa sprang up and rang her bell with mad haste. "Get me a horse!" she cried, "and bid William be ready to ride with me for his life—for my life—along the coast, to Dover!"

They rode, and they galloped, through the night, scarcely staying to bait their horses. But, when they came to Dover, they looked out to sea upon the white sails that bore Duke and his child away. Theresa was too late, and it broke her heart. She lies buried in Dover church-yard. After long years, Duke returned to England; but his place in parliament knew him no more, and his daughter's husband sold Crowley Castle to a stranger.

TWO FRAGMENTS OF GHOST STORIES

I

I HAVE no objection to tell you to what I alluded the other night, as I am too rational, I trust, to believe in ghosts; at the same time, I own it has ever remained an unexplained circumstance; and the impression it left on my own mind was so vivid and so painful that for years I could not bear to think at all on the subject. To you, even, I do not mind owning that I once made a considerable round to avoid Birmingham as a sleeping-place. This was thoroughly ridiculous; and so I felt it at the time. I think you know enough of my father and mother to recall a little of the gentle formality of the Society to which they used to belong. Don't you remember how my mother would check any "vain talking" in her own mild, irresistible way? All tales and stories which were not true were excluded from the dear old nursery-library at Heverington. Much more so were ghosts and fairies prohibited; though the knowledge that there were such things to be talked about came to us, I don't know how. Do you know, I even now draw back from telling the story of my fright! I do believe I am making this preamble, in order to defer the real matter of my letter. But now I will begin at once.

I was going back to school at Dunchurch; and my father could not go with me, because of some special jury-case at Chester which he was obliged to attend; so I was to be put in charge of the guard of the coach as far as Birmingham, where a friend of my father's was to meet me, and take me to sleep at his house. It was on the 26th of January; so

you may be sure it was dark when we got into Birmingham about seven o'clock. The coach rumbled into an inn-yard, and I was wakened out of my sleep by some one popping in a broad-brimmed hat (with a head under it, I suppose; only the hat stood out in relief against the light) and asking if Hannah Johnson was there? I remember feeling frightened at saying "Yes," and wishing that some one were there to answer for me; and at last I spoke sadly too loud—but I had tried twice before, and no voice had come.

Well! I was soon bundled, more asleep than awake, into a gig; and my luggage was all stowed away till morning, in the booking-office, I suppose. We had a drive of two miles, or it might be two miles and a half, out of the very thick of the town into a sort of suburb on a hill-side. The houses were plain and commonplace enough (red-brick, I saw the next morning, they were), with a long slip of garden, up which we had to walk. A woman Friend came to the steps, with a candle in her hand, to meet us; and I liked her from the first better than her silent husband, who did his duty, but never spoke. She made me take off my shoes; felt my stockings to see if they were wet; then she hurried tea, to which I remember I had no sugar, because of the slave-trade, which many good people were then striving to put down. She talked a good deal to me; and, if her husband had not been there, I should have talked much more openly back again; but, as it was, I remember feeling sure he was listening behind his newspaper; and very uncomfortable it made me. I recollect she had let the cat jump on her knee and was stroking it, and it was purring; but he gave it a slap and sent it down, saying, "Esther, thee hadst three drab gowns last year. That cat will cost me as many this." I don't remember his speaking again; but I know I was as glad as the cat to get out of the room, and upstairs to my snug bedroom. The house was joined to another; and, somehow, they dove-tailed together; so that, though there was but one room in the front, there were two in width behind; one on each side of the passage.

We breakfasted in the left-hand room at the back next morning; but I never knew what the right-hand room was. Only, over it on the first floor, was the chamber I was to sleep in that night; and very comfortable it looked, with a pleasant fire, and a great deal of crimson and white about the room. You went in, and had the fire on your right-hand and the bed opposite to you, and the large window, with the dressing-table under it, on the left. The house altogether must have been eighty or ninety years old; I judge from the chimney-pieces, which, I recollect, were very high, with narrow shelves, and made of painted wood, with garlands tied with ribbons, carved, not very well, upon them. The bed, I remember, was a great, large one—too large for the room, I should think; but you heard me say I have never seen it since that time. Judging from my recollections, I should imagine the furniture had been picked up at sales, in accordance with the thriftiness of the master of the house. (I do not mention his name, because he has a nephew, a respectable tea-dealer in Bull Street, and a member of the Society of Friends, who would not, I am sure, like to have his name connected with a ghost-story.)

All these things I was too tired to notice that night. I put my feet into hot water—though I would much rather have gone straight to bed—because my kind hostess urged it; and then it was found out I had left my carpet-bag at the inn; so I had to wait till a night-gown and night-cap of hers was aired. And at last I tumbled into bed.

I think I fell asleep directly; at any rate, I don't remember anything of being awake. But, by-and-by, I wakened up suddenly. To this day, I don't know what wakened me; but I was all at once perfectly conscious, although at first I was puzzled to remember where I was. The fire had burnt down, but not very much; there was, however, not a great deal of light from it. But it seemed as if there were some light behind the right-hand curtain at the head of the bed; just as if some one had been in and put a candle down on the drawers, which stood between the bed

and the window. I thought I must have forgotten to put the candle out, though I did not remember putting it there. I had some debates with myself as to whether I would leave my warm bed, and get up into the cold and put it out; and I think I should never have troubled myself about it, if I had not remembered that the candle would be burnt down before morning, and that perhaps I might get a scolding from my host. Still, I was so lazy! and I thought I could perhaps stretch out of bed far enough to put it out without fairly getting up. So I shuffled to the cold side of the bed (which was fully large enough, and indeed prepared for two people).

I name this, because I remember the wide-awake feeling which the icy coldness of the fine linen sheets gave me, when I was lying across them; stretching out, I undrew the crimson moreen curtain. There was no candle; but a bright light—very red; more like the very earliest blush of dawn on a summer's morning than anything else; but very red and glowing. It seemed to come from, or out of—I don't know how—the figure of a woman, who sat in the easy chair by the head of the bed. I think she was a young woman, but I did not see her face; it was bent down over a little child which she held in her arms, and rocked backwards and forwards, as if she were getting it to sleep, with her cheek on its head. She took no notice of my drawing back the curtain, though it made a rustling noise, and the rings grated a little on the rod. I could draw the pattern of the chintz gown she wore; of a kind called by my mother, a *palampore:* an Indian thing, with a large straggling print on it, but which had been in fashion many years before.

I don't think I was frightened then; at least, I looked curiously, and did not drop the curtain, as I should have done if I had been frightened, I think. I thought of her as somebody in great distress; her gesture and the way she hung her head all showed that. I knew very little about the people I was staying with; they might have babies, for aught I knew, and this might be some friend or visitor, who was soothing a restless child. I knew my mother often

walked about with my little brother who was teething. But it was rather strange I had not seen this lady at tea; and a little strange too that her dress was so very gay and bright-coloured, because in general such dress would be considered by Friends to savour too much of the world, and would be remonstrated against. While these thoughts were passing through my mind—of course in much less time than it takes me to write them down—the lady rose, and I dropped the curtain and . . . . . .

II

Well, my dear Bob, let those laugh who win! You, who were so much amused at my being captivated by the queerly-worded advertisement of lodgings in the "Guardian," would be glad enough, I fancy, to exchange your small, dingy, smoky rooms in Manchester (even granted the delights of a railway excursion every day during Whitsun-week) for my Lorton Grange, though my host cannot write grammar, any more than my hostess can speak it. I do like the spice which the uncertainty of the result gives to any adventure; and therefore my spirits grew higher and more boisterous, the wilder and more desolate grew the hills and the moors, over which I passed in the shandry my landlord had sent to meet me at the station.

When I say the "station," you are not to picture to yourself anything like a Euston or a Victoria; but just a modest neat kind of turnpike-house, with no other dwelling near it; no passengers crowding for tickets, no pyramids of luggage. I myself was the only person to alight, and the train whizzed away, leaving me standing and gazing (rather sadly I must confess) at the last relic of a town I was to see for a whole week. But the delicious mountain-air blew away melancholy; and I had not gone many paces before I saw the shandry, jogging along on its

approach to the station. Worthy Mr. Jackson fancied he had an hour to spare for a chat with his friend at the station, and a rest for his horse. No wonder! for, when I arrived at Lorton Grange, I found the clocks differed by two hours from one another, and each an hour from the real time of day. Does not this speak volumes as to the way in which life is dreamt away in these dales?

Good-man Jackson was taciturn enough on the drive—a circumstance I did not dislike, as it gave me leisure to look about. The road wound up among brown heathery hills, with scarce a bush to catch a stray light, or a passing shadow; the few fences there were to be seen were made of loose stones piled on one another, and cemented solely by the moss and ferns which filled up every crevice. I do not intend to worry you by description of scenery, any more than will be absolutely necessary to give you an idea of my *locale*; so I shall only say that, after about an hour's drive over these hills, "fells" and "knots," as my landlord called them, we dropped down by a most precipitous road into the valley in which Lorton Grange is situated.

The dale is about half a mile in breadth, with a brawling, dashing, brilliant, musical stream dividing it into unequal halves. At places, the grey rocks hem the noisy, sparkling waters in, and absolutely encroach upon their territory; again they recede and leave bays of the greenest of green meadows between rock and river. On one of these Lorton Grange was erected some three hundred years ago; and rather a stately place it must have been in those days. It is built around a hollow square, and must have been roomy enough, when all the sides were appropriated to the use of the family. Now two are occupied as farm-buildings, and one is almost in ruins; it has been gutted to serve as a large barn, and the rain evidently comes in, every here and there, through the neglected roof. The front of the quadrangular building is used as the dwelling-place of the farmer's family. Formerly, a short avenue must have led up to the ivy-covered porch from the road which is flanked by the afore-mentioned

river. Now, all the trees are felled, except one noble beech, which sweeps the ground close to the walls of the house, and throws into green obscurity one charming window-seat in my sitting-room. All over the front of the house clamber roses, flaunting their branches above the very eaves; but they seem to grow by sufferance now, and to flower from summer to summer without imparting pleasure to any one.

You must not suppose that we drove up to the grand entrance; the old carriage-road has long been ploughed up, and grass now grows where once the Lortons paced daintily along their avenue. Mr. Jackson took me to the back-door in the inner square, fluttering two or three dozen hens and turkeys, and evoking a barking welcome from almost as many dogs and whelps. I steered my way through the dim confusion of a large crowded kitchen, having for guide the voice of some female, who at the end of a dark passage kept calling, "This way, sir; this way;" and at last I arrived at the room in which I now write—the ancient hall, I take it.

I could write down an inventory of the furniture and description of any room in a lodging-house in Manchester; but I think I might defy you to return the compliment, and form even a guess at the apartment I am now occupying. Think of four windows, and five doors, to begin with! Two of my windows look to the front, and are casements, draperied with ivy; through one the glancing waters of the stream glint into my room, when the sun shines as it does now; the other two look into the noisy farm-yard; but on these window-seats are placed enormous unpruned geraniums and fuchsias, which form an agreeable blind. As to the doors, two of them are mysteries to me at this present; one is the back entrance to the room through which . . . . . .

END OF VOL. VII

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